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an Interpretation of Gide

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ACCENT
A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE
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WALLACE FOWLIE:

The Fountain and the Thirst: an Interpretation of Gide

The multiple aspects of André Gide's sensitivity and intelligence have been countless times enumerated and analyzed. His restlessness, his endless quest and curiosity have led him through philosophies, experiences, and genres until his very extensive work stands out today as the major source for our contemporary aesthetic and moral problems. He has been publishing continuously for fifty-three years. But during this period, between 1891, when his first book, *Les Cahiers d'André Walter,* appeared, and 1944, when his *Journal 1939-1942* was published in New York, Gide has maintained, despite the diversity of his thought, a central rôle of extraordinary unity. In fact, no other rôle could represent such oneness of purpose and attitude, because it is that of Narcissus.

Gide no longer appears to us as the diversifier or the wearer of many masks. Both contemplator and contemplative, he is the man of our age who has looked most religiously and most lovingly at himself and at the mirrored features of the universe. Great books, those of our age and of other ages, renew the myths of mankind. Those of Gide renew the myth of Narcissus, of that being who questions himself by means of his sight and the steady searching of his eyes. To know the form of his very soul was the objective of the youth who bent down over the waters of the fountain and excluded from his sight and from his passion all that was not he himself.

We are familiar with the story of the myth, but we are usually unaware of its resurgence among us. We remember Narcissus as that youth for whom a kiss was impossible because the lips he desired were his own. He was the boy held not by the world, but by the appearance of the world as it outlined itself in the colorless water. Centered in this mirrored appearance of the world was

his own form with which Narcissus strove to unite himself. Here the Greek myth reveals the universal quest of man: union with one's first self, union with reality and the pure part of one's created being.

As one book has succeeded another, the written words of Gide have become increasingly transparent and revelatory. His books are like crystal works of art, like the mirror-fountain of Narcissus, that catch partial reflections of the world and of himself. The steady gaze of Narcissus into the clear water is the myth of man, whereas the works of the artist are the sacrifice he makes to the world, of himself and of his self-contemplation. In each book Gide tries to recompose his features. Each book is a forcing of himself toward that form which has been lost in the universe. They are a series of mirrors, whose beauty lies not so much in the reflected traits, as in the seriousness of the contemplation and the fervent search to unite with the original self.

At the very inception of his career, Gide wrote a brief tract of Narcissus *(Traité du Narcisse)*. It was published in the same year that his first book appeared. Today, in the perspective of many years, the interpretation of Narcissus seems more centrally relevant to Gide's work than his *André Walter*. The influence of Mallarmé and the symbolists is strong in both of these early pieces. Sterility and hamletism characterize Gide's first hero, André Walter, in his incapacity to meet life with action or equate his dream with reality. But in his statement on the problems of Narcissus, Gide alters the symbolist pose of immobility enacted by Baudelaire's albatross and Mallarmé's swan. The sailors who have emprisoned the albatross on the deck of the boat, and the lake which has frozen over the white wings of the swan, are symbols of the world opposing the necessary freedom of the artist's spirit. But the attraction which Narcissus feels in the calm water of the fountain has not been imposed upon him by any outside force. He is free in his self-love and wills this strange solitary contemplation. There is a vast difference between the detrimental weight of the world making impossible any soaring of the artist, and the long gaze of his eyes which Narcissus directs downward into the tranquil waters of a fountain. In each pose: in the incarcerated pose of the symbolist, and in the self-willed and hypnotic pose of Narcissus, the artist is alone. But the reason for the pose is different in each case.

The experience of the romantic or the symbolist seeking to release himself from the bonds of society and the material world is less metaphysical than the experience of Narcissus seeking to attach himself to the profoundest part of his own being. The symbolist seeks release in order to create a new part of himself in a new freedom. Narcissus seeks attachment in order to discover the oldest and most permanent part of himself. One moves toward an unconceived form; the other toward a lost form. Narcissus is therefore religious in his striving to unite with what he feels to be a lost primitive reality, and the symbolist is still romantic in his striving to be what is unreal and imaginary.

Through his renewal of the Narcissus myth, André Gide has separated himself from the romantic trend which, more than any other, has characterized Western literature of the last 150 years. After his initial treatment of the

subject in 1891, he has continued to recast the same problem in all of his major books. Not consciously has Gide recreated the myth in his writings. But the problem of Narcissus is Gide's, and the fervor of its application is religious.

II

The first important book of André Gide, *Les Nourritures Terrestres,* was published in 1897, but was not read until several years later. This work is a song of love, and especially a song on the thirst of love. Like Narcissus, the singer in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* is contemplating water in the desert of his desire, or that source which might satisfy his thirst.

Echo and the other nymphs who are abandoned by Narcissus, are, in the personal experience of Gide, his early puritanism and timidity, Europe, and the life of intellection. Africa is both oasis and desert, both fertility and thirst, where the new Narcissus can forget much of his early heritage and lose himself in a new search for his being.

Les Nourritures Terrestres is the second major attack in French letters on the XIXth century and on the exaggerated rôles of science, of bourgeoisism, and of the nation. The first attack was written in the century itself, in 1873, by a boy of nineteen, Arthur Rimbaud. *Une Saison en Enfer* announces a flight to Africa, where by joining the race of the negroes, Rimbaud might plunge into a pre-Christian period and forget the morality imposed upon him by his Catholic baptism and the bourgeois conventions of his age. Unlike Gide, Rimbaud was the artist of violence. He renewed, in his flights of self-annihilation, another myth, fully as ancient of that of Narcissus, in the history of man: the myth of the phoenix. The work of Rimbaud is a self-immolation. He had to destroy himself utterly in order to rise up again from his own ashes.

These two works are songs of love. Rimbaud's relates the love of violence and self-destruction, and Gide's relates the love of contemplation and of self. Rimbaud, in *Une Saison en Enfer,* portrays himself as the hyena, the convict, and the sinner who, Samson-like, causes to crash down upon his own head the world he despised and refused to obey. Gide, in *Les Nourritures Terrestres,* portrays himself as the sensualist who knows the universe through his senses, who feels directly the touch of the earth, of plants, the taste of wine, the longing of thirst and desire, the air of nights and dawns, the ecstasy of sleep. Rimbaud, in his phoenix reincarnation, denounced his century by destroying the artist in himself and by resurrecting himself in Ethiopia as a gun-runner for King Menelok. Gide, in his Narcissus reincarnation, denounced the same century by willfully creating, from a background of bourgeois Calvinism, the artist in himself. The sands, the oasis springs, and the suppleness of young Arabs which he contemplated in North Africa were the reflections of himself, of the self he willed to become, of that part of him most distant from the earlier Paris self.

He tells us explicitly in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* that the characters he names never existed. Ménalque, who seems to be the teacher of this new fervor, and Nathanaël, who is the disciple being taught, are the two rôles of Narcissus: the one who looks and the one who is seen. No characters in the book, and yet

it is a book on love. The central dogma in this new religion of love is that of Vision. Gide tells us countless times that the act of seeing is more significant than the thing seen. It is the desire which counts and enriches the soul, and not the possession of the thing desired.

This is perhaps the fullest definition we can give of the Gidian term "fervor." Fervor seems to imply an attainment to the bareness of being, to the first elemental part of a man, and also to the fullness of emotion, to the amplitude which precedes any satisfaction or collapse of emotion. Two words: "attentes" and "fièvre" recur so persistently throughout the text of Gide that they can be taken as synonyms of his fervor in which one being is all beings. To wait, in a state of fever, describes the love of Narcissus. Nathanaël is the soul of Gide to which he speaks in his desert thirst and love, as the fountain is the reflection of Narcissus into which he directs his gaze.

Gide's own soul is his first and his last disciple. When he refers to an imaginary disciple, he relates his efforts to lead the disciple away from all things dissimilar to him: his family, his room, his books, his past. This same kind of seduction was related by Lautréamont and by Rimbaud. With Gide it is less violent because he has the tenderness of Narcissus who fears to breathe lest the surface of the water be troubled. Narcissus learns to judge his own being by its ability to receive light, and Gide judges all beings thus. The extreme degree of luminous receptivity is the measure of love any being is capable of. Light refracted from his face is the joy of Narcissus.

No one exists in *Les Nourritures Terrestres*. Even Gide himself is just Vision. (*Et meme moi, je n'y suis rien que Vision.* p. 151.) And Narcissus also changes his being into vision. That is why in the ancient myth and in its modern version of *Les Nourritures Terrestres* there is no place for the theme of solitude. Because there is no experience of solitude in the usual romantic sense. To be alone *in* oneself, in the deepest part of oneself, is vastly different from being alone *with* oneself. When Narcissus is alone in himself, he ceases being a single person. *Je suis peuplé,* writes Gide (p. 177) when he becomes aware of the multiple selves of his being. Hidden and moving within him are all men, all races, and all moments. The hypnotized quiet of Narcissus is necessary for Gide to feel inhabited.

The pose of Gide in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* is absence from the world. Yet all the world is present in him. He is not alone in his absence, because his solitary existence has become quietly and fervently all existences. Narcissus of the myth thus becomes the artist reincarnated in our age, to an extraordinarily pure degree, by André Gide. The love expressed in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* is the love of the artist: prepared and protracted and fortified by a very special kind of vision of the world. Little wonder that young men, gifted in the art of creative work and thought, have been moved and tormented by this book. It is about their problem which is a new kind of love evolved by the XIXth and XXth centuries.

The modern artist has become Narcissus, and *Les Nourritures Terrestres* is his epithalamium. It is a marriage song celebrating the union of the artist with

the world. But the union is consummated by vision and not by participation. The artist is the man who sings of the world without acting in the world. He is chained before the picture of the world, and his sole relationship with it is his dangerous and exquisite power of sight.

The silences of the modern artist are as regular as his speech. When night blots out the picture of the world, his words are interrupted, his work arrested. Between the visible beauty of the world and the hidden depths of the artist's being, a creative relationship exists. But this is broken off and suspended during each period of night when he can no longer see. Narcissus needed the light of the sun, as the modern artist does, in order to pursue his seeing inquest.

As Narcissus is the myth of the love which is generated solely by sight, so *Les Nourritures Terrestres* is the love of the ancient myth regenerated by an ever-deepening self-examination. Each instant brings a newer and more visible awareness of oneself. Each instant is therefore different from all other instants. The unpredictable newness of the coming instant underlies the principle of narcissistic love. Because of it, the past is constantly being destroyed for Narcissus; as for Nathanaël, books, after they are read, are rejected and burned.

The desire for love is more real than love. To love, in the ordinary sense, implies the making of a choice. But Nathanaël has learned that he must choose nothing less than everything. And everything is nothing more than what he sees. God is totally in any one part of His universe. Since God is everywhere, any one being can reveal Him to us. And especially the being which is ourself.

III

The concept itself of God provides the transition between Gide's first important book, *Les Nourritures Terrestres,* and his second important book, *La Porte Etroite,* published twelve years later, in 1909.

In between these two books, *L'Immoraliste* appeared in 1902. This "récit" is a narrative version of *Les Nourritures Terrestres.* The protagonist Michel is a combination of Nathanaël and his teacher. Michel teaches himself, cures himself, and watches himself throughout the story. His return to health in Africa is equivalent to a new awareness of himself and of deeply hidden desires within his being. He watches the Arab boy Moktir steal a pair of scissors and sees himself liberated from conventional morality. Out of the earlier song of desire and thirst, Gide fashioned in *L'Immoraliste* a circumstantial tale of narcissistic love.

La Porte Etroite is the same narcissistic dilemma, but raised to a Christian level. The title itself, "Straight is the gate," of Biblical origin, gives a clue to our interpretation. This narrow door is comparable to a mirror or a fountain or any reduced area on which one has to live by means of an extraordinary concentration of power. Alissa, in this novel, seeks to learn how to pass alone, without Jérôme, through the narrow door, as Narcissus, in the myth, seeks to inhabit his own solitude and pierce in the reflection on the water the continuous vision of himself.

One fifth of the book is made up of extracts from Alissa's journal. This form of writing, used so consistently by Gide in almost every one of his books, is narcissistic in serving as a steadying mirror of one's thoughts and features. The narrative part of the story is both explicated and surpassed by Alissa's journal. There the themes become luminous and poignant because there they are really seen for the first time.

The pervasive quality of narcissism in *La Porte Etroite* is apparent not only in the title and in the journal form of writing, but also in the use of the garden setting, particularly on hot summer evenings, where many of the scenes take place and where the dilemma grows to its highest pitch of intensity. The garden in *La Porte Etroite* is comparable to the desert in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* and to the fountain in *Narcisse*. These three settings really serve as reflections of the same psychological state. They are limited and reduced, because they are needed to contain the form of only one individual, of that unique self which is André Gide.

Finally, to this list of narcissistic traits, to the title, to the journal, to the garden in *La Porte Etroite,* we can add the close blood relationship of Alissa and Jérôme. The fact that Alissa is Jérôme's cousin makes her a kind of family reflection of himself, another self in whom the same traits are either reduced or enlarged. They experience the same inner feelings, even when they are separated by large distances, as if they were the same person. And Alissa always more intensively than Jérôme, as if she were Narcissus and Jérôme were her reflection.

Even when Alissa and her sister Juliette were children, Jérôme knew that Alissa was the girl he wanted to watch and contemplate, and that her sister was the girl he wanted to play with. At the moment when, as a young boy, he saw Alissa's face covered with tears, he realized that his life vocation had been decided. He knew then that he was destined to watch and wait patiently and ineffectually throughout his life. His sentence, *Moi, je ne te quitterai jamais* (p. 41), is stated at the beginning of a poem on the form of love in which no action takes place.

The rôles of Jérôme and Alissa are easily reversible. Gide is in both of them, but more persistently in Alissa. Jérôme waits. He is Narcissus in the physical quietness of his body. But Alissa looks steadily at the thoughts and experiences of Jérôme and at the garden site of her solitude. (*Ici rien n'est changé dans le jardin.* p. 127) She says that she sees everything through him (*je regarde a travers toi chaque chose,* p. 129), and this she continues to do even more fully and more amorously when Jérôme is travelling. The narcissistic theme becomes most pronounced when Alissa confesses that her love is more perfect when Jérôme is at a great distance from her (*de loin je t'aimais davantage,* p. 155). Her solitude in the garden fashions for Alissa a love, not real, but which seems perfect, and turns her into a solipsist, which appears to be a modern term synonymous with narcissist.

The word "happiness" is often on the lips of Alissa. The meaning she attaches to it is difficult to ascertain, and yet in this meaning lies the key to her

dilemma and her desires. We can understand best what happiness is not for Alissa. It is nothing which can be saved or guarded; it is nothing to which she wishes or hopes to attain quickly. It is exactly opposed to the happiness which Emma Bovary desires and believes she can have. Fundamentally, Emma is guided by a bourgeois morality of possession, whereas Alissa is guided by a morality of sacrifice. Happiness for Emma depends on an obscure confusion of infinite and continuous approach to God. Emma tries to save her life and therefore loses it. Alissa tries to lose her life by avoiding the world and Jérôme and all facile happiness. Constantly she narrows the physical sphere of her world. She eliminates her family, her books, Jérôme, and finally the garden itself. This is the action of Narcissus, of Nathanaël in *Les Nourritures Terrestres,* of Michel in *L'Immoraliste,* of the prodigal son in *Le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue* (1907). It is Gide's personal interpretation of renouncement which equates salvation. To save oneself is to renounce everything and attain the ultimate state of unencumberedness which Gide defines as *disponibilité.*

Her journal is proof enough that Alissa was not happy in her regimen of renouncement. Michel in *L'Immoraliste* represents immoderate avidity, and Alissa in *La Porte Etroite* represents immoderate virtue. Both destroy their lives. Gratuitous ardor on a hedonistic level, as in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* and in *L'Immoraliste* can become confused with ascetic severity on a puritanical level, as in *La Porte Etroite.* The religious experience in Gide, whether it be Pagan or Protestant, appears always in the form of search. The usual religious experience implies some direct knowledge of God, some awareness of the absolute. But Gide's experience is exclusively a quest. There is vague sadness at the end of Michel's quest, and profound sadness at the end of Alissa's.

For Narcissus, the fate of continuously seeing attaches him to the fountain site of a garden. Alissa appears attached to the same site for the same intent purpose. She sees herself throughout the years grow dim and unlovely. In her the myth of world-renouncement and self-love becomes the pathos of solipsism, Had she attained to a religious experience, her solitude would have been happiness. When woman is only Narcissus, she sees not her beauty and her principle as the adolescent boy did, but her vanishing beauty and her losing life.

IV

It was not until 1925, at the age of fifty-six, that Gide published what he has called his first novel, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs.* Thus he comes to the form of the novel only after using other genres: the "treatise" on *Narcisse,* the dithyrambic utterances of *Les Nourritures Terrestres,* the sober tales of *L'Immoraliste* and *La Porte Etroite.* Mauriac has written that the novel begins where solipsism leaves off. But no single definition of the form is applicable to all novels. Mauriac's definition applies to his own writings, but Gide's novel is largely solipsistic, or, as we prefer to call it, "narcissistic."

The central character Edouard is the novelist, who is Gide, and who is also Narcissus. Edouard both acts in the drama and comments on it. He is therefore both protagonist and chorus. He is both Narcissus and the reflection.

Perhaps the analogy with Narcissus is not quite so accurate as it would be with the Neptunian: the single man who is two. But the Neptunian, or the dual character, is a variation of Narcissus.

Edouard the novelist is alone, standing midway between two worlds. On one side of him is the world of the young: inhabited especially by Bernard and Olivier. And on the other side of him is the world of adults: composed especially of parents, of ministers, of teachers. The artist finds himself between the world of the rebels and the uninitiate and the world of the moralists who stand for security and law. He is the man outside of life, who suffers from his apartness from normal living, and yet who, because of this suffering, is able to contemplate life more steadily, more amorously, and more heroically than other men who are daily destroyed by life. Tonio Kröger in Thomas Mann's story admirably states this predicament when he says: "I am sick to death of depicting humanity without having any part or lot in it." Edouard is the artist incapable of any facile kind of happiness in terms of human relationships. In the same way, Alissa stands apart from her sister and from Jérôme. And the singer in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* stands apart from Nathanaël and Ménalque.

In *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* the Neptunian character of Edouard is involved in all the various dramas of the novel, and yet he remains aloof from them all. The drama closest to him, and therefore the central drama of the work, is his relationship to Bernard and Olivier. Edouard is unable to hold Bernard, but he does hold Olivier. The experience with Olivier, one which would be condemned by society, is transposed and spiritualized in the novel. By this experience Edouard reveals himself a Neptunian in playing simultaneously the rôles of sinner and artist. He is both held by the earth and drawn to heaven. This is no case of schizophrenia, because Edouard remains at all times relentlessly lucid and determined. By being the artist, he wills to attract others different from himself.

The very title of the work, the "counterfeiters," proves that the subject is not schizophenia but neptunianism. It is a novel about a man who behaves in one way in the eyes of the world, and who all the time is making plans for another behavior. The artist, the teacher, and the priest, whose vocations demand a fairly fixed pattern of living, are most easily Neptunian. They can lead dual and simultaneous existences of good and evil. They can most easily appear one character and be another. Edouard is one man when he is seen by others in the novel, and another man when he sees himself in his own journal. Good and evil seem to be equal forces in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs,* and it is with considerable reason that the doctrine of manicheism has been exhumed from its pages. The endless dialogue which Edouard (or Gide) carries on with himself is much more than introspection: it is a dialogue between two different characters who are the same man.

Previous to Gide's work, the novel concerned itself largely with the rôle of fate, with the conflict between good and evil, with social forces, with the struggle between opposing passions. But it never concerned itself solely with the essence of a single being. This is what Gide tries to do in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs.* In

Edouard's temptation to stay with Olivier, to influence him deliberately, and even to make him his secretary, lies the desire to see his own essence more bare. When at this point in the novel, Edouard decides to avoid the temptation and go to London, it is simply a case of Narcissus becoming Huguenot. He is attempting to know a way more difficult than that of his own nature. *Partir parce que l'on a trop grande envie de rester!* (p. 161.)

In order to mark his break with Olivier at this time, Edouard buys a new notebook for his journal. The new format and the fresh clean pages, which help him to consummate a painful separation and begin a new chapter in his life, are a facile symbol for another fountain over whose waters the same thirst will be renewed. Edouard (or Gide) always remains the artist who lives by his thirst, and never becomes the protagonist who is defeated by passion or by events in a tragedy or in a novel.

This explains the final sentence of the book: *Je suis bien curieux de connaitre Caloub.* There is no end or even climax to the narcissistic pose of Edouard. Events and dramas and sentiments affect him deeply but they only interrupt momentarily the mirroring of himself in the universe and in the faces of those around him. The last pages of the novel relate the tragic suicide of the boy Boris in his classroom. The pistol shot which kills him is like a stone being thrown into the fountain. For a moment the reflection is shattered. Edouard can no longer see himself in the unpredictable death of a school boy. But gradually the waters resume their evenness and the gaze returns. There was not sufficient motivation in this suicide to satisfy the novelist and the analyst Edouard. He refuses to incorporate it in his *Faux-Monnayeurs* and his gaze continues to be directed toward that part of the universe which he can still fathom, and which is himself, so different from an ill-considered and brutal suicide. Like Narcissus, Gide is not concerned with progress in morality, but with something which is at once more particularized and more universalized than morality: with progress in man's sincerity.

In 1935, Gide published *Les Nouvelles Nourritures,* which is a recast of *Les Nourritures Terrestres* following an interlude of thirty-eight years. The style is more sober and chaste than that of the earlier book. Gide now seems more intent on formulating conclusions about sensory experience than on describing the experience itself. Yet underneath these more meditative and even philosophical passages, continue the same fervent quest and excitement, the same *frémissement,* the same eager self-examination. And there seems to be a larger number of narcissistic images. Gide talks about the white page of his notebook as something which shines in front of him (*la page blanche luit devant moi,* p. 20); he describes his pose of bending down and looking beyond the present (*je me penche par-dela le présent,* p. 21); he has learned to realize from the "moment" the quietness of "eternity" (*je sais a présent gouter la quiète éternité dans l'instant,* p. 27). These are all exercises of Narcissus on his absorption with the universe.

Especially, in *Les Nouvelles Nourritures,* the innumerable sentences on the concept of God reveal the use which Gide has made of the term and his

increasing personal enlightenment about what the name of God has meant to him in the past. We remember the opening sentence in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* of 1897: *Ne souhaite pas, Nathanaël, trouver Dieu ailleurs que partout.* ("Do not hope to find God elsewhere than everywhere.") In the new pages of 1935, God is described as being diffused throughout His creation, both hidden and lost in it, continually discovering Himself in it, to the point of confusing Himself with His own creation. (cf. p. 76.) The meaning which Gide might have attached to the concept of God during his lifetime has always been obscured by the facility and the frequency with which he uses the term. The meaning of God has always been replaced by the poetic invocation given to the word "God." All the concepts in Gide's mind which are the most vaguely outlined and the most difficult to comprehend—namely, all those concepts which he enjoys the most, have been poured into the general concept of God as if it were a vase of endlessly changing proportions capable of contraction or expansion. The word "God" has been synonymous for Gide with all kinds of notions and sentiments, of questions and answers. It is the word reflecting all other words which has become "Gidian" in its diversity and constancy. In the *Traité du Narcisse* it was "contemplation"; in *Les Nourritures Terrestres* it was "fervor"; in *La Porte Etroite* it was "renouncement"; in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* it was "detachment." These four words, when given a religious connotation, designate the attitude of Narcissus in the profoundest meaning of his self-exploration. The confusions of Gide can never be solved as long as he remains Narcissus. He is looking not at God but at himself, and not even at himself but at a reflection of himself.

The parables which recur the most continuously in the writings of Gide substantiate two of his cardinal beliefs: 1. that a single individual is more interesting than all men; 2. that the only valid adventure for an individual is that one which is most dangerous for him to undertake. This is the meaning Gide attaches to the stories of the lost sheep and the prodigal son, and to the verse: "Whosoever loseth his life shall save it." These three lessons from the Gospels could easily be construed as Christian interpretations of the Narcissus myth. Each one seems to be built around the doctrinal admonition to leave the familiar world in order to engage oneself with the unknown.

In calling nature God, Gide joins himself with the great romantics, and especially with Rousseau who sought to merge himself with unfathomed and chaotic nature. Romanticism is the major protest man has made against civilization and against reason. The romantic tries first to establish his uniqueness (Narcissus, the dandy, the artist), and then to experience a quasi-mystical union with nature. But by calling nature God, the romantic does not thereby convert nature into God. The romantic union is one between man and the chaos of nature and sentiment. Gide, as we tried to point out at the beginning of this study, is the most recent of the romantic artists and one who subsumes and even transcends the movement by the extraordinary fervor he brings to the rôle of Narcissus. He tracks down his being, arrests all his movements, and then from the deepest part of his spirit, conjures up a mythical past.

BARBARA HOWES:

The Age of Consent

The earth sprawls three miles down
And reality, for the moment, is sheer geometry and speed,—
Radiant angles of the air,
Diminishing craters bombs follow;
There seems to be little need

For anything beyond precision,
A trained hand tender on the trigger, a lucky-piece;
The pilot, compressed in his urgency
To be its will and welded to
His plane, cannot release

The coiled springs of his body
Or let his pivoting hawk's mind relax, until
Their flight veered round, he watches
Their shadows on the homeward sea
Fish-skittering toward land's sill;

And presently he will swerve
Down to seek rest. With what can he cancel and blot out
All these aimed foray-hours
When hatred and technique were so
Strangely blended, and doubt

No more than a hair of dust
In the bombsight, throughout the stentorian wayfaring of
His plane? He has loosed his roc's
Eggs of destruction and now how
Shall he find peace? Love

In its full gravity
Flings past the rim of rage, far out past turbulence;
In its trajectory
The blood grows cordial; what welcoming
Beyond experience

Should he not, homing, need
And meet? Scapegoat Daedalus risked by the world's sloth,
God make his passage into

Love secure and deep; for dawn
May wake up death.

ROBERT RICHMAN:

Letter from These Dead

Although October deaths
Will grow from April births,
As the man who goes to the maskroom
Takes off a mask, selects a mask,
I come from these dead to assume my own
Of the masks that will not fit;
Of the masks I should not wear.
But what of the interval
Between the putting on and taking off;
and what of the masks I will not find?

Although I did not hope to see
The wheel of fire revolve through change
And burn, I have seen chaos come
Riding a crystal of snow to death
On the flat light of the afternoon.
Like the first wound or the last leaf
A sorrowed lover stands.
And as the man who wishes to alter
Courses of the sea with his finger
Will know, the sea is forever
Only the sea that washes rock.
And on some island will be the garden I
Lie in to look for fractured stars;
But here across my hands
An ant, a cricket, and an asp will crawl.

J. F. POWERS:

Prince of Darkness

I. Morning

"I should've known you'd be eating breakfast, Father. But I was at your Mass and I said to myself that must be Father Burner. Then I stayed a few minutes after Mass to make my thanksgiving."

"Fine," Father Burner said. "Breakfast?"

"Had it, Father, thanking you all the same. It's the regret of my life that I can't be a daily communicant. Doctor forbids it. 'Fast every day and see how long you last,' he tells me. But I do make it to Mass."

"Fine. You say you live in Father Desmond's parish?"

"Yes, Father. And sometimes I think Father Desmond does too much. All the societies to look after. Plus the Scouts and the Legion. Of course Father Kells being so elderly and all . . . "

"We're all busy these days."

"It's the poor parish priest's day that's never done, I always say, Father, not meaning to slight the ladies, God love 'em."

Father Burner's sausage fingers, spelling his impatience over and over, worked up sweat in the folds of the napkin which he kept in view to provoke an early departure. "About this matter you say Father Desmond thought I might be interested in—"

"The Plan, Father." Mr. Tracy lifted his seersucker trousers by the creases, crossed his shining two-tone shoes and rolled warmly forward. "Father . . . "

Father Burner met his look briefly. He was wary of the fatherers. A backslider he could handle, it was the old story, but a red hot believer, especially a talkative one, could be a devilish nuisance. This kind might be driven away only by prayer and fasting, and he was not adept at either.

"I guess security's one thing we're all after."

Father Burner grunted. Mr. Tracy was too familiar to suit him. He liked his parishioners to be retiring, dumb or frightened. There were too many references made to the priest's hard lot. Not so many poor souls as all that passed away in the wee hours, nor was there so much bad weather to brave. Mr. Tracy's heart bled for priests. That in itself was a suspicious thing in a layman. It all led up to the Plan.

"Here's the Plan, Father . . . " Father Burner watched his eye peel down to naked intimacy. Then, half listening, he gazed about the room. He hated it too. A fabulous brown rummage of encyclopedias, world globes, maps, photographs, holy pictures, mirrors, crucifixes, tropical fish and too much furniture. The room reproduced the world in exact scale, all wonders and horrors seemingly, less land than water. From the faded precipices of the walls

photographs viewed each other for the most part genially across time. Three popes, successively thinner, raised hands to bless their departed painters. The world globes simpered in the shadows, heavy-headed idiot boys, listening. A bird in a blacked-out cage scratched among its offal. An anomalous buddha peeked beyond his dusty umbilicus at the trampled figures in the rug. The fish swam on, the mirrors and encyclopedias turned in upon themselves, the earless boys heard everything and understood nothing. Father Burner put his big black shoe on a moth and sent dust flecks crowding up a shaft of sunlight to the distant ceiling.

"Say you pay in $22.50 every month, can be paid semi-annually or as you please, policy matures in twenty years and pays you $35.67 a month for twenty years or as long as you live. That's the deal for you, Father. It beats the deal Father Desmond's got, although he's got a darned good one, and I hope he keeps it up. But we've gone ahead in the last few years, Father. Utilities are sounder, bonds are more secure and this new legislation protects you one hundred per cent."

"You say Ed—Father Desmond—has the Plan?"

"Oh, indeed, Father." Mr. Tracy had to laugh. "I hope you don't think I'm trying to high-pressure you, Father. It's not just a piece of business with me, the Plan."

"No?"

"No. You see, it's more or less a pet project of mine. Hardly make a cent on it. Looking out after the fathers, you might say, so they'll maybe look out after me—spiritually. I call it heavenly life insurance."

Slightly repelled, Father Burner nodded.

"Not a few priests that I've sold the Plan to remember me at the altar daily. I guess prayer's one thing we can all use. Anyway it's why I take a hand in putting boys through seminary."

With that Mr. Tracy shed his shabby anonymity and grew executive markings for Father Burner. He became the one and only Thomas Nash Tracy—T. N. T. It was impossible to read the papers and not know a few things about T. N. T. He was in small loans and insurance. His company's advertising smothered the town and country; everybody knew the slogan T. N. T. spells Security. He figured in any financial drive undertaken by the diocese, was caught by photographers in orphanages and sat at the heavy end of the table at communion breakfasts. Hundreds of nuns, thanks to his thoughtfulness, ate capon on Christmas Day and a few priests of the right sort received baskets of scotch. He was a B. C. L., a Big Catholic Layman, and now Father Burner could see why. Father Burner's countenance softened at this intelligence and T. N. T. proceeded with more assurance.

"And don't call it charity, Father. Insurance, as I said, is a better name for it. I have a little money, Father, which makes it possible." He tuned his voice down to a whisper. "You might say I'm moderately wealthy." He looked sharply at Father Burner, not sure of his man. "But I'm told there isn't any crime in that."

"I believe you need not fear for your soul on that account."

"Glad to hear it from you, a priest, Father. Oft times it's thrown up to me." He came to terms with reality, smiling. "I wasn't always so well off myself, so I can understand the temptation to knock the other fellow."

"Fine."

"But that's still not to say that water's not wet or that names don't hurt sometimes, whatever the bard said to the contrary."

"What bard?"

" 'Sticks and stones—' "

"Oh."

"If this were a matter of Faith and Morals, Father, I'd be the one to sit back and let you do the talking. But it's a case of common sense, Father, and I think I can safely say if you listen to me you'll not lose by it in the long run."

"It could be."

"May I ask you a personal question, Father?"

Father Burner searched T. N. T.'s face. "Go ahead, Mr. Tracy."

"Do you bank, Father?"

"Bank? Oh, bank—no. Why?"

"Let's admit it, Father," T. N. T. coaxed, frankly amused. "Priests as a class are an improvident lot—our records show it—and you're no exception. But that, I think, explains the glory of the Church down through the ages."

"The Church is divine," Father Burner corrected. "And the concept of poverty isn't exactly foreign to Christianity or even to the priesthood."

"Exactly," T. N. T. agreed, pinked. "But think of the future, Father."

Nowadays when Father Burner thought of the future it required a firm act of imagination. As a seminarian twenty years ago, it had all been plain: ordination, roughly ten years as a curate somewhere (he was not the kind to be sent to Rome for further study), a church of his own to follow, the fruitful years, then retirement, pastor emeritus, with assistants doing the spade work, leaving the fine touches to him, still a hearty old man very much alive. It was not an uncommon hope and in fact all around him it had materialized for his friends. But for him it was only a bad memory growing worse. He was the desperate assistant now, the angry functionary aging in the outer office. One day he would wake up and find himself old, as the morning finds itself covered with snow. The future had assumed the forgotten character of a dream, so that he could not be sure that he had ever truly had one.

T. N. T. talked on and Father Burner felt a mist generating on his forehead. He tore his damp hands apart and put the napkin aside. Yes, yes, it was true a priest received miserably little, but then that was the whole idea. He did not comment, dreading T. N. T.'s foaming compassion, to be spat upon with charity. Yes, as a matter of fact, it would be easier to face old age with something more to draw upon than what the ecclesiastical authorities deemed sufficient and would provide. Also, as T. N. T. pointed out, one never knew when he might come down with an expensive illness. T. N. T., despite himself, had something . . . The Plan, in itself, was not bad. He must not reject the olive

branch because it came by buzzard. But still Father Burner was a little bothered by the idea of a priest feathering his nest. Why? In other problems he was never the one to take the ascetic interpretation.

"You must be between thirty-five and forty, Father."

"I'll never see forty again."

"I'd never believe it from anyone else. You sure don't look it, Father."

"Maybe not. But I feel it."

"Worries, Father. And one big one is the future, Father. You'll get to be fifty, sixty, seventy—and what have you got?—not a penny saved. You look around and say to yourself—where did it go?"

T. N. T. had the trained voice of the good and faithful servant, supple from many such dealings. And still from time to time a faint draught of contempt seemed to pass through it which had something to do with his eyes. Here, Father Burner thought, was the latest thing in simony, unnecessary, inspired from without, participated in spiritlessly by the priest who must yet suffer the brunt of the blame and ultimately do the penance. Father Burner felt mysteriously purchasable. He was involved in an exchange of confidences which impoverished him mortally. In T. N. T. he sensed free will in its senility or the infinite capacity for equating evil with good—or with nothing, the same thing, only easier. Here was one more word in the history of the worm's progress, another wave on the dry flood that kept rising, the constant aggrandizement of decay. In the end it must touch the world and everything at the heart. Father Burner felt weak from a nameless loss.

"I think I can do us both a service, Father."

"I don't say you can't." Father Burner rose quickly. "I'll have to think about it, Mr. Tracy."

"To be sure, Father." He produced a glossy circular. "Just let me leave this literature with you."

Father Burner, leading him to the door, prevented further talk by reading the circular. It was printed in a churchy type, all purple and gold, a dummy leaf from a medieval hymnal, and entitled, "A Silver Lining in the Sky." It was evidently meant for clergymen only, though not necessarily priests, as Father Burner could instantly see from its general tone.

"Very interesting," he said.

"My business phone is right on the back, Father. But if you'd rather call me at my home some night—"

"No thanks, Mr. Tracy."

"Allow me to repeat, Father, this isn't just business with me."

"I understand." He opened the door too soon for T. N. T. "Glad to have met you."

"Glad to have met you, Father."

Father Burner went back to the table. The coffee needed warming up and the butter had vanished into the toast. "Mary," he called. Then he heard them come gabbing into the rectory, Quinlan and his friend Keefe, also newly ordained.

They were hardly inside the dining room before he was explaining how he came to be eating breakfast so late—so late, see?—not *still*.

"You protest too much, Father," Quinlan said. "The Angelic Doctor himself weighed three hundred pounds and I'll wager he didn't get it all from prayer and fasting."

"A pituitary condition," Keefe interjected, faltering. "Don't you think?"

"Yah, yah, Father, you'll wager"—Father Burner, eyes malignant, leaned on his knife, the blade bowing out bright and buttery beneath his fist—"and I'll wager you'll be the first saint to reach heaven with a flannel mouth!" Rising from the table, he shook Keefe's hand, which was damp from his pocket, and experienced a surge of strength, the fat man's contempt and envy for the thin man. He thought he might break Keefe's hand off at the wrist without drawing a drop of blood.

Quinlan stood aside, six inches or more below them, gazing up, as at two impossibly heroic figures in a hotel mural. Reading the caption under them, he mused, "Father Burner meets Father Keefe."

"I've heard about you, Father," Keefe said, plying him with a warmth beyond his means.

"Bound to be the case in a diocese as overstocked with magpies as this one." Father Burner threw a fresh napkin at a plate. "But be seated, Father Keefe." Keefe, yes, he had seen him before, a nobody in a crowd, some affair . . . the K. C. barbecue, the Youth Center? No, probably not, not Keefe, who was obviously not the type, too crabbed and introversive for Catholic Action. "I suppose," he said, "you've heard the latest definition of Catholic Action—the interference of the laity with the inactivity of the hierarchy."

"Very good," Keefe said uneasily.

Quinlan yanked off his collar and churned his neck up and down to get circulation. "Dean in the house? No? Good." He pitched the collar at one of the candles on the buffet for a ringer. "That turkey we met coming out the front door—think I've seen his face somewhere."

"Thomas Nash Tracy," Keefe said. "I thought you knew."

"The prominent lay priest and usurer?"

Keefe coughed. "They say he's done a lot of good."

Quinlan spoke to Father Burner: "Did you take out a policy, Father?"

"One of the sixth-graders threw a rock through his windshield," Father Burner said. "He was very nice about it."

"Muldoon or Ciesniewski?"

"A new kid. Public school transfer." Father Burner patted the napkin to his chin. "Not that I see anything wrong with insurance."

Quinlan laughed. "Let Walter tell you what happened to him a few days ago. Go ahead, Walter," he said to Keefe.

"Oh, that." Keefe fidgeted and seemingly against his better judgment began. "I had a little accident—was it Wednesday it rained so? I had the misfortune to skid into a fellow parked on Fairmount. Dented his fender." Keefe stopped and then, as though impelled by the memory of it, went on.

"The fellow came raging out of his car at me. I thought there'd be serious trouble. Then he must have seen I was a priest, the way he calmed down, I mean. I had a funny feeling it wasn't because he was a Catholic or anything like that. As a matter of fact he wore a Masonic button." Keefe sighed. "I guess he saw I was a priest and . . . ergo knew I'd have insurance."

"Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor scrip," Quinlan said, "words taken from today's gospel."

Father Burner spoke in a level tone: "Not that I *still* see anything wrong with insurance. It's awfully easy," he continued, hating himself for talking such drivel, "to make too much of little things." With Quinlan around he played the conservative; among the real righthanders he was the enfant terrible. He operated on the principle of discord at any cost. He did not know why. It was a habit. Perhaps it had something to do with being overweight.

Arranging the Dean's chair, which had arms, for himself, Quinlan sank into it, giving Keefe the Irish whisper. "Grace, Father."

Keefe addressed the usual words to God concerning the gifts they were about to receive. During the prayer Father Burner stopped chewing and did not reach for anything. He noted once more that Quinlan crossed himself sloppily enough to be a bishop.

Keefe nervously cleared the entire length of his throat. "It's a beautiful church you have here at Saint Patrick's, Father." A lukewarm light appeared in his eyes, flickered, sputtered out, leaving them blank and blue. His endless fingers felt for his receding chin in the onslaught of silence.

"*I* have?" Father Burner turned his spoon abasingly to his bosom. *"Me?"* He jabbed at the grapefruit before him, his second, demolishing its perfect rose window. "I don't know why it is the Irish without exception are always laying personal claim to church property. The Dean is forever saying *my* church, *my* school, *my* furnace . . . "

"I'm sorry, Father," Keefe said, flushing. "And I'll confess I did think he virtually built Saint Patrick's."

"Out of the slime of the earth, I know. A common error." With sudden, unabated displeasure Father Burner recalled how the Dean, one of the last of the old brick and mortar pastors, had built the church, school, sisters' house and rectory, and had named the whole thing through the lavish pretense of a popular contest. Opposed bitterly by Polish, German and Italian minorities, he had effected a compromise between their bad taste (Saint Stanislaus, Saint Boniface, Saint Anthony) and his own better judgment in the choice of Saint Patrick's.

Quinlan, snorting, blurted: "Well, he did build it, didn't he?"

Father Burner smiled at them from the other world. "Only, if you please, in a manner of speaking."

"True," Keefe murmured humbly.

"Nuts," Quinlan said. "It's hard for me to see God in a few buildings paid for by the funds of the faithful and put up by a mick contractor. A burning bush, yes."

Father Burner, lips parched to speak an unsummonable cruelty, settled for

a smouldering aside to the kitchen. "Mary, more eggs here."

A stuffed moose of a woman with a tabbycat face charged in on swollen feet. She stood wavering in shoes sliced fiercely for corns. With the back of her hand she wiped some cream from the fuzz ringing her baby-pink mouth. Her hair poked through a broken net like stunted antlers. Father Burner pointed to the empty platter.

"Eggs," he said.

"Eggs!" she cried, tumbling her eyes like great blue dice among them. She seized up the platter and carried it whirling with grease into the kitchen.

Father Burner put aside the grapefruit. He smiled and spoke calmly. "I'll have to let the Dean know, Father, how much you like *his* plant."

"Do, Father. A beautiful church . . . 'a poem in stone'—was it Ruskin?"

"Ruskin? *Stones of Venice,"* Father Burner grumbled. *"Sesame and Lilies,* I know . . . but I never cared for his *style."* He passed the knife lovingly over the pancakes on his plate and watched the butter bubble at the pores. "So much sweetness, so much light, I'm afraid, made Jack a dull boy."

Quinlan slapped all his pockets. "Pencil and paper, quick!"

"And yet . . . " Keefe cocked his long head, brow fretted, and complained to his upturned hands. "Don't understand how he stayed outside the Church." He glanced up hopefully. "I wonder if Chesterton gives us a clue."

Father Burner, deaf to such precious speculation, said: "In the 19th century Francis Thompson was the only limey worth his salt. It's true." He quartered the pancakes. "Of course, Newman."

"Hopkins has some good things."

"Good—yes, if you like jabberwocky and jebbies! I don't care for either." He dispatched a look of indictment at Quinlan.

"What a pity," Quinlan murmured, "Oliver Wendell couldn't be at table this morning."

"No, Father, you can have your Hopkins, you and Father Quinlan here. Include me out, as Sam Goldwyn says. Poetry, I'll take my poetry the way I take my liquor, neat."

Mary brought in the platter oozing with bacon and eggs.

"Good for you, Mary," Quinlan said. "I'll pray for you."

"Thank you, Father," Mary said.

Quinlan dipped the platter with a trace of obeisance to Father Burner.

"No thanks."

Quinlan scooped up the coffeepot in a fearsome rush and held it high at Father Burner, his arm so atremble the lid rattled dangerously. "Sure and will you be about having a sup of coffee now, Father?"

"Not now. And do you mind not playing the wild Irish wit so early in the day, Father?"

"That I don't. *But a relentless fate pursuing good Father Quinlan, he was thrown in among hardened clerics where but for the grace of God that saintly priest, so little understood, so much maligned* . . . " Quinlan poured two cups and passed one to Keefe. "For yourself, Father."

Father Burner nudged the toast to Keefe. "Father Quinlan, that saintly priest, models his life after the Rover Boys, particularly Sam, the fun-loving one."

Quinlan dealt himself a mighty mea culpa.

Father Burner grimaced, the flesh rising in sweet concentric tiers around his mouth, and said in a tone both entrusting and ennobling Keefe with his confidence: "The syrup, if you please, Father." Keefe passed the silver pitcher which was running at the mouth. Father Burner reimmersed the doughy remains on his plate until the butter began to float around the edges as in a moat. He felt them both watching the butter. Regretting that he had not foreseen this attraction, he cast about in his mind for something to divert them and found the morning sun coming in too strongly. He got up and pulled down the shade. He returned to his place and settled himself in such a way that a new chapter was indicated. "Don't believe I know where you're located, Father."

"Saint Jerome's," Keefe said. "Monsignor Fiedler's."

"One of those P. N. places, eh? Is the Boss sorry he ever started it? I know some of them are."

Keefe's lips popped apart. "I don't quite understand."

Quinlan prompted: "P. N.—Perpetual Novena."

"Oh, I never heard him say."

"You wouldn't, of course. But I know a lot of them that are." Father Burner stuck a morsel on his fork and swirled it against the tide of syrup. "It's a real problem all right. I was all out for a P. N. here during the depression. Thought it might help. The Dean was against it."

"I can tell you this," Keefe said. "Attendance was down from what it used to be until the casualties began to come in. Now it's going up."

"I was just going to say the war ought to take the place of the depression." Father Burner fell silent. "Terrible thing, war. Hard to know what to do about it. I tried to sell the Dean the idea of a victory altar. You've seen them. Vigil lights—"

"At a dollar a throw," Quinlan said.

"Vigil lights in the form of a V, names of the men in the service and all that. But even that, I guess— Well, like I said, I tried . . . "

"Yes, it is hard," Keefe said.

"God, the Home and the Flag," Quinlan said. "The poets don't make the wars."

Father Burner ignored that. "Lately, though, I can't say how I feel about P. N.'s. Admit I'm not so strong for them as I was once. Ought to be some way of terminating them, you know, but then they wouldn't be perpetual, would they?"

"No, they wouldn't," Keefe said.

"Of course the term itself, perpetual novena, is preposterous, a solecism. Possibly dispensation lies in that direction, I'm not theologian enough to say. Fortunately it's not a problem we have to decide." He laid his knife and fork across the plate. "Many are the consolations of the lowly curate. No decisions,

no money worries."

"We still have to count the sugar," Quinlan said. "And put up the card tables."

"Reminds me," Father Burner said earnestly. "Father Desmond at Assumption was telling me they've got a new machine does all that."

"Puts up card tables?" Quinlan inquired.

"Counts the collection, wraps the silver," Father Burner explained, "so it's all ready for the bank. Mean to mention it to the Dean, if I can catch him right."

"I'm afraid, Father, he knows about it already."

Father Burner regarded Quinlan sceptically. "Does? I suppose he's against it."

"I heard him tell the salesman that's what he had his assistants for."

"Assistant, Father, not assistants. You count the collection, not me. I was only thinking of you."

"I was only quoting him, Father. *Sic.* Sorry."

"Not at all. I haven't forgotten the days I had to do it. It's a job has to be done and nothing to be ashamed of. Wouldn't you say, Father Keefe?"

"I daresay that's true."

Quinlan, with Father Burner still molesting him with his eyes, poured out a glass of water and drank it all. "I still think we would do with a lot less calculating. I notice the only time we get rid of the parish paper is when the new lists are published—the official standings. Of course it's a lousy sheet anyway."

Father Burner, as editor of the paper, replied: "Yes, yes, Father. We all know how easy it is to be wrathful or fastidious about these things—or whatever the hell it is you are. And we all know there *are* abuses. But contributing to the support of the Church is still one of her commandments."

"Peace, Pere," Quinlan said.

"Figures don't lie."

"Somebody was telling me just last night that figures do lie. He looked a lot like you."

Father Burner found his cigarettes and shuffled a couple half out of the pack. He eyed Quinlan and the cigarettes as though it were as simple to discipline the one as to smoke the others. "For some reason, Father, you're damned fond of those particular figures."

Keefe stirred. "Which particular figures, Fathers?"

"It's the figures put out by the Cardinal of Toledo on how many made their Easter duty last year." Father Burner offered Keefe a cigarette. "I discussed the whole thing with Father Quinlan last night. It's his latest thesis. Have a cigarette?"

"No, thanks," Keefe said.

"So you don't smoke?" Father Burner looked from Keefe to Quinlan, blacklisting them together. He held the cigarette hesitantly at his lips. "It's all right, isn't it?" He laughed and touched off the match with his thumbnail.

"His Eminence," Quinlan said, "reports only fifteen per cent of the women

and five per cent of the men made their Easter duty last year."

"So that's only three times as many women as men," Father Burner said with buried gaiety. "Certainly to be expected in any Latin country."

"But fifteen per cent, Father! And five per cent! Just think of it!" Keefe glanced up at the ceiling and at the souvenir plates on the moulding, as though to see inscribed along with scenes from the Columbian Exposition the day and hour the end of the world would begin. He finally stared deep into the goldfish tank in the window.

Father Burner ploughed up the silence, talking with a mouthful of smoke. "All right, all right, I'll say what I said in the first place. There's something wrong with the figures. A country as overwhelmingly Catholic as Spain!" He sniffed, pursed his lips, and said: "Pooh!"

"Yes," Keefe said, still balking. "But it *is* disturbing, Father Burner."

"Sure it's disturbing, Father Keefe. *Lots* of things *are*."

A big faded goldfish paused to stare through the glass at them and then with a single lob of its tail slipped into a dark green corner.

Quinlan said, "Father Burner belongs to the school that's always seeing a great renascence of faith in the offing. The hour before dawn and all that. Tell it to Rotary on Tuesday, Father."

Father Burner countered with a frosty pink smile. "What would I ever do without you, Father? If you're trying to say I'm a dreadful optimist, you're right and I don't mind at all. I am—and proud of it!"

Ascending to his feet, he went to the right side of the buffet, took down the card index to parishioners and returned with it to his place. He pushed his dishes aside and began to sort out the deadheads to be called on personally by him or Quinlan. The Dean, like all pastors, he reflected, left the dirty work to the assistants. "Why doesn't he pull them," he snapped, tearing up a card, "when they kick off! Can't very well forward them to the next world. Say, how many Gradys live at 909 South Vine? Here's Anna, Catherine, Clement, Gerald, Harvey, James A., James F.—which James is the one they call 'Bum'?"

"James F.," Quinlan said. "Can't you tell from the take? The other James works."

"John, Margaret, Matthew—that's ten, no eleven. Here's Dennis out of place. Patrick, Rita and William—fourteen of them, no birth control there, and they all give. Except Bum. Nice account otherwise. Can't we find Bum a job? What's it with him, drink?"

Now he came to Maple Street. These cards were the remains of little Father Vicci's work among the magdalens. Ann Mason, Estelle Rogers, May Miller, Billie Starr. The names had the generic ring. Great givers when they gave—Christmas, $25.00; Easter, $20.00; Propagation of the Faith, $10.00; Catholic University, $10.00—but not much since Father Vicci was exiled to the sticks. He put Maple Street aside for a thorough sifting.

The doorbell rang. Father Burner leaned around in his chair. "Mary." The doorbell rang again. Father Burner bellowed. "Mary!"

Quinlan pushed his chair away from the table. "I'll get it."

Father Burner blocked him. "Oh, I'll get it! Hell of a bell! Why does he have a bell like that!" Father Burner opened the door to a middle-aged woman whose name he had forgotten or never known. "Good morning," he said. "Will you step in?"

She stayed where she was and said, "Father, it's about the servicemen's flag in church. My son Stanley—you know him—"

Father Burner, who did not know him, half nodded. "Yes, how is Stanley?" He gazed over her shoulder at the lawn, at the dandelions turning into poppies before his eyes.

"You know he was drafted last October, Father, and I been watching that flag you got in church ever since and it's still the same, five hundred thirty-six stars. I thought you said you put a star up for all them that's gone in the service, Father."

Now the poppies were dandelions again. He could afford to be firm with her. "We can't spend all our time putting up stars. Sometimes we fall behind. Besides, a lot of the boys are being discharged."

"You mean there's just as many going in as coming out, so you don't have to change the flag?"

"Something like that."

"I see." He was sorry for her. They had run out of stars. He had tried to get the Dean to order some more, had even offered . . . and the Dean had said they could use up the gold ones first. When Father Burner had objected, telling him what it would mean, he had suggested that Father Burner apply for the curatorship of the armory.

"The Pastor will be glad to explain how it works the next time you see him."

"Well, Father, if that's the way it is . . . " She was fading down the steps. "I just thought I'd ask."

"That's right. There's no harm in asking. How's Stanley?"

"Fine, and thank you, Father, for your trouble."

"No trouble."

When he came back to the table they were talking about the junior clergymen's examinations which they would take for the first time next week. Father Burner interrupted: "The Dean conducts the history end of it, you know."

"I say!" Keefe said. "Any idea what we can expect?"

"You have nothing to fear. Nothing."

"Really?"

"Really. Last year, I remember, there were five questions and the last four depended on the first. So it was really only one question—if you knew it. I imagine you would've." He paused, making Keefe ask for it.

"Perhaps you can recall the question, Father?"

"Perfectly, Father. 'What event in the American history of the Church took place in 1541?'" Father Burner, slumping in his chair, smirked at Keefe pondering for likely martyrs and church legislation. He imagined him skipping among the tomes and statuary of his mind, winnowing dates and

little known facts like mad, only at last to emerge dusty and downcast. Father Burner sat up with a jerk and assaulted the table with the flat of his hand. "Time's up. Answer: 'De Soto sailed up the Mississippi.' "

Quinlan snorted. Keefe sat very still, incredulous, silent, utterly unable to digest the answer, finally croaking, "How odd." Father Burner saw in him the boy whose marks in school had always been a consolation to his parents.

"So you don't have to worry, Father. No sense in preparing for it. Take in a couple of movies instead. And cheer up! The Dean's been examining the junior clergy for twenty-five years and nobody ever passed history yet. You wouldn't want to be the first one."

Father Burner said grace and made the sign of the cross with slow distinction. "And, Father," he said, standing, extending his hand to Keefe, who also rose, "I'm glad to have met you." He withdrew his hand before Keefe was through with it and stood against the table knocking toast crumbs onto his plate. "Ever play any golf? No? Well, come and see us for conversation then. You don't have anything against talking, do you?"

"Well, of course, Father, I . . . "

Father Burner gave Keefe's arm a rousing clutch. "Do that!"

"I will, Father. It's been a pleasure."

"Speaking of pleasure," Father Burner said, tossing Quinlan a stack of cards, 'I've picked out a few lost sheep for you to see on Maple Street, Father."

II. Noon

He hung his best black trousers on a hanger in the closet and took down another pair, also black. He tossed them out behind him and they fell patched at the cuffs and baggy across his unmade bed. His old suede jacket, following, slid dumpily to the floor. He stood gaping in his clerical vest and undershorts, knees knocking and pimply, thinking . . . what else? His aviator's helmet. He felt all the hooks blindly in the darkness. It was not there. "Oh, hell!" he groaned, sinking to his knees. He pawed among the old shoes and boxes and wrapping paper and string that he was always going to need. Under his golf bag he found it. So Mary had cleaned yesterday.

There was also a golf ball unknown to him, a Royal Bomber, with one small hickey in it. Father Desmond, he remembered, had received a box of Royal Bombers from a thoughtful parishioner. He stuck the helmet on his balding head to get it out of the way and took the putter from the bag. He dropped the ball at the door of the closet. Taking his own eccentric stance—a perversion of what the pro recommended and a dozen books on the subject—he putted the ball across the room at a dirty collar lying against the bookcase. A thready place in the carpet caused the ball to jump the collar and to loose a pamphlet from the top of the bookcase. He restored the pamphlet—Pius XI on "Atheistic Communism"—and poked the ball back to the door of the closet. Then, allowing for the carpet, he drove the ball straight, *click,* through the collar, *clop.* Still had his old putting eye. And his irons had always been steady if not

exactly crashing. It was his woods, the tee shots, that ruined his game. He'd give a lot to be able to hit his woods properly, not to dub his drives, if only on the first tee—where there was always a crowd (mixed).

At one time or another he had played every hole at the country club in par or less. Put all those pars and birdies together, adding in the only two eagles he'd ever had, and you had the winning round in the state open, write-ups and action shots in the papers—photo shows Rev. Ernest "Boomer" Burner, par-shattering padre, blasting out of a trap. He needed only practice perhaps and at his earliest opportunity he would entice some of the eighth-grade boys over into the park to shag balls. He sank one more for good measure, winning a buck from Ed Desmond who would have bet against it, and put the club away.

Crossing the room for his trousers he noticed himself in the mirror with the helmet on and got a mild surprise. He scratched a little hair down from underneath the helmet to offset the egg effect. He searched his eyes in the mirror for a sign of ill health. He walked away from the mirror, as though done with it, only to wheel sharply so as to see himself as others saw him, front and profile, not wanting to catch his eye, just to see himself . . .

Out of the top drawer of the dresser he drew a clean white silk handkerchief and wiped the shine from his nose. He chased his eyes over into the corner of the mirror and saw nothing. Then, succumbing to his original intention, he knotted the handkerchief at the crown of the helmet and completed the transformation of time and place and person by humming, vibrato, "Jeannine, I dream in lilac time," remembering the old movie. He saw himself over his shoulder in the mirror, a sad war ace. It reminded him that his name was not Burner, but Boerner, an impediment removed at the outset of the first world war by his father. In a way he resented the old man for it. They had laughed at the seminary; the war, except as theory, hardly entered there. In perverse homage to the old Boerner, to which he now affixed a proud "von," he dropped the fair-minded American look he had and faced the mirror sneering, scar-cheeked and black of heart, the flying Junker who might have been. "Himmel-kreuzdonnerwetter! When you hear the word 'culture,'" he snarled, hearing it in German, "reach for your revolver!"

Reluctantly he pulled on his black trousers, falling across the bed to do so, as though felled, legs heaving up like howitzers.

He lay still for a moment, panting, and then let the innerspring mattress bounce him to his feet, a fighter coming off the ropes. He stood looking out the window, buckling his belt, and then down at the buckle, chins kneading softly with the effort, and was pleased to see that he was holding his own on the belt, still a good half inch away from last winter's highwater mark.

At the sound of high heels approaching on the front walk below, he turned firmly away from the window and considered for the first time since he posted it on the wall the prayer for priests sent him by a candle concern. "Remember, O most compassionate God, that they are but weak and frail human beings. Stir up in them the grace of their vocation which is in them by the imposition of the Bishops' hands. Keep them close to Thee, lest the enemy prevail against them, so that they may never do anything in the slightest degree unworthy of

their sublime . . . " His eyes raced through the prayer and out the window . . .

He was suddenly inspired to write another letter to the Archbishop. He sat down at his desk, slipped a piece of paper into his portable, dated it with the saint's day it was, and wrote, "Your Excellency: Thinking my letter of some months ago may have gone amiss, or perhaps due to the press of business—" He ripped the paper from the portable and typed the same thing on a fresh sheet until he came to "business," using instead "affairs of the Church." He went on to signify—it was considered all right to "signify," but to re-signify?—that he was still of the humble opinion that he needed a change of location and had decided, since he believed himself ready for a parish of his own, a rural one might be best, all things considered (by which he meant easier to get). He, unlike some priests of urban upbringing and experience, would have no objection to the country. He begged to be graced with an early reply. That line, for all its seeming docility, was full of dynamite and ought to break the episcopal silence into which the first letter had dissolved. This was a much stronger job. He thought it better for two reasons: the Archbishop was supposed to like outspoken people, or, that being only more propaganda talked up by the sycophants, then it ought to bring a reply which would reveal once and for all his prospects. Long overdue for the routine promotion, he had a just cause. He addressed the letter and placed it in his coat. He went to the bathroom. When he came back he put on the coat, picked up the suede jacket and helmet, looked around for something he might have forgot, a book of chances, a box of Sunday envelopes to be delivered, some copy for the printer, but there was nothing. He lit a cigarette at the door and not caring to throw the match on the floor or look for the ashtray, which was out of sight again, he dropped it in the empty holy water font.

Downstairs he paused at the telephone in the hall, scribbled "Airport" on the message pad, thought of crossing it out or tearing off the page, but since it was dated he let it stand and added "Visiting the sick," signing his initials, *E. B.*

He went through the wicker basket for mail. A card from the Book-of-the-Month Club. So it was going to be another war book selection this month. Well, they knew what they could do with it. He wished the Club would wake up and select some dandies, as they had in the past. He thought of *Studs Lonigan*—there was a book, the best thing since the Bible.

An oblique curve in the road: perfect, wheels parallel with the center line. So many drivers took a curve like that way over on the other fellow's side. Father Burner touched the lighter on the dashboard to his cigarette and plunged his hams deeper into the cushions. A cloud of smoke whirled about the little Saint Christopher garroted from the ceiling. Father Burner tugged viciously at both knees, loosening the binding black cloth, easing the seat. Now that he was in open country he wanted to enjoy the scenery—God's majesty. How about a sermon that would liken the things in the landscape to the people in a church? All different, all the same, the handiwork of God. Moral: it is right and meet for rocks to be rocks, trees to be trees, pigs to be pigs, but—and here the small gesture that says so much—what did that mean that men, created

in the image and likeness of God, should be? And what— He thrust the sermon out of mind, tired of it. He relaxed, as before an open fireplace, the weight of dogma off his shoulders. Then he grabbed at his knees again, cursing. Did the tailor skimp on the cloth because of the ecclesiastical discount?

A billboard inquired—"Pimples?" Yes, he had a few, but he blamed them on the climate, the humidity. Awfully hard for a priest to transfer out of a diocese. He remembered the plan he had never gone through with. Would it work after all? Would another doctor recommend a change? Why? He would only want to know why, like the last bastard. Just a slight case of obesity, Reverend. Knew he was a non-Catholic when he said Reverend. Couldn't trust a Catholic one. Some of them were thicker than thieves with the clergy. Wouldn't want to be known as a malingerer, along with everything else.

Another billboard—"Need Cash? See T. N. T."

Rain. He knew it. No flying for him today. One more day between him and a pilot's license. Thirteen hours yet and it might have been twelve. Raining so, and with no flying, the world seemed to him . . . a valley of tears. He would drive on past the airport for a hamburger. If he had known, he would have brought along one of the eighth-grade boys. They were always bragging among themselves about how many he had bought them, keeping score. One of them, the Cannon kid, had got too serious from the hamburgers. When he said he was "contemplating the priesthood" Father Burner, wanting to spare him the terrible thing a false vocation could be, had told him to take up aviation instead. He could not forget the boy's reply: *But couldn't I be a priest like you, Father?*

On the other hand, he was glad to be out driving alone. Never had got the bang out of playing with the kids a priest in this country was supposed to. The failure of the Tom Playfair tradition. He hated most sports. Ed Desmond was a sight at a ball game. Running up and down the base lines, giving the umpires hell, busting all the buttons off his cassock. Assumption rectory smelled like a locker room from all the equipment. Poor Ed.

The rain drummed on the engine hood. The windshield wiper sliced back and forth, reminding him a little of a guillotine. Yes, if he had to, he would die for the Faith.

From here to the hamburger place it was asphalt and slicker than concrete. Careful. Slick. Asphalt. Remembered . . . Quinlan coming into his room one afternoon last winter when it was snowing, the idiot, prating:

Here were decent godless people:
Their only monument the asphalt road
And a thousand lost golf balls . . .

That was Quinlan for you, always spouting against the status quo without having anything better to offer. Told him that. Told him golfers, funny as it might seem to some people, have souls and who's to save them? John Bosco worked wonders in taverns, which was not to say Father Burner thought he was a saint, but rather only that he was not too proud to meet souls halfway

wherever it might be, in the confessional or on the fairways. Saint Ernest Burner, Help of Golfers, Pray for Us! (Quinlan's come back.) Quinlan gave him a pain. Keefe, now that he knew what he was like, ditto. Non-smokers. Jansenists. First fervor is false fervor. They would cool. He would not judge them, however.

He slowed down and executed a sweeping turn into the parking lot reserved for patrons of the hamburger. He honked his horn his way, three shorts and a long—victory. She would see his car or know his honk and bring out two hamburgers, medium well, onions, pickle, relish, tomato, catsup, his way.

She came out now, carrying an umbrella, holding it ostensibly more over the hamburgers than herself. He took the tray from her. She waited dumbly, her eyes at a level with his collar.

"What's to drink?"

"We got pop, milk, coffee . . . " Here she faltered, as he knew she would, washing her hands of what recurrent revelation, rather than experience, told her was to follow.

"A nice cold bottle of beer." Delivered of the fatal words, Father Burner bit into the smoking hamburger. The woman turned sorrowfully away. He put her down again for native Protestant stock.

When she returned, sheltering the bottle under the umbrella, Father Burner had to smile at her not letting pious scruples interfere with business, another fruit of the so-called Reformation. Watch that smile, he warned himself, or she'll take it for carnal. He received the bottle from her hands. For all his familiarity with the type, he was uneasy. Her lowered eyes informed him of his guilt.

Was he immoderate? Who on earth could say? *In dubiis libertas,* not? He recalled his first church supper at Saint Patrick's, a mother bringing her child to the Dean's table. She's going to be confirmed next month, Monsignor. Indeed? Then tell me, young lady, what are the seven capital sins? Pride, Covetousness . . . Lust, Anger. Uh. The child's mother, one of those Irish females built like a robin, worried to death, lips silently forming the other sins for her daughter. Go ahead, dear. Envy. Proceed, child. Yes, Monsignor. Uh . . . Sloth. To be sure. That's six. One more. And . . . uh. Fear of the Lord, perhaps? Meekness? Hey, Monsignor, ain't them the Divine Counsels! The Dean, smiling, looking at Father Burner's plate, covered with chicken bones, at his stomach, fighting the vest, and for a second into the child's eyes, slipping her the seventh sin. *Gluttony,* Monsignor! The Dean gave her a coin for her trouble. She stood awkwardly in front of Father Burner, lingering, twisting her gaze from his plate to his stomach, to his eyes, finally quacking, Oh Fawther!

Now he began to brood upon his failure as a priest. There was no sense in applying the consolations of an anchorite to himself. He wanted to know one thing: when would he get a pastorate? When would he make the great metamorphosis from assistant to pastor, from mouse to rat, as the saying went? He was forty-three, four times transferred, seventeen years an ordained priest, a curate yet and only. He was the only one of his class still without a parish.

The only one . . . and in his pocket, three days unopened, was another letter from his mother, kept waiting all these years, who was to have been his housekeeper. He could not bear to warm up her expectations again.

Be a chaplain? That would take him away from it all and there was the possibility of meeting a remote and glorious death carrying the Holy Eucharist to a dying soldier. It would take something like that to make him come out even, but then that too, he knew in a corner of his heart, would be only exterior justification for him, a last bid for public approbation, a short cut to nothing. And the chaplain's job, it was whispered, could be an ordeal both ignominious and tragic. It would be just his luck to draw an assignment in a rehabilitation center, racking pool balls and repairing ping pong bats for the boys—the apostolic game-room attendant and toastmaster. Sure, Sarge, I'll lay you even money the Sox make it three straight in Philly and spot you a run a game to boot. You win, I lose a carton of Chesters—I win, you go to Mass every day for a week! Hard-headed holiness . . .

There was the painful matter of the appointment to Saint Patrick's. The Dean, an irremovable pastor, and the Archbishop had argued over funds and the cemetery association. And the Archbishop, losing though he won, took his revenge, it was rumored, by appointing Father Burner as the Dean's assistant. It was their second encounter. In the first days of his succession, the Archbishop heard that the Dean always said a green Mass on Saint Patrick's Day, thus setting the rubrics at nought. Furious, he summoned the Dean into his presence, but stymied by the total strangeness of him and his great age, he had talked of something else. The Dean took a different view of his narrow escape, which is what the chancery office gossips called it, and now every year, on repeating the error, he would say to the uneasy nuns, "Sure and nobody ever crashed the gates of hell for the wearing of the green." (Otherwise it was not often he did something to delight the hearts of the professional Irish.)

In the Dean's presence Father Burner often had the sensation of confusion, a feeling that someone besides them stood listening in the room. To free himself he would say things he neither meant nor believed. The Dean would take the other side and then . . . there they were again. The Dean's position in these bouts was roughly that of the old saints famous for their faculty of smelling sins and Father Burner played the role of the one smelled. It was no contest. If the Archbishop could find no words for the Dean there was nothing he might do. He might continue to peck away at a few stray foibles behind the Dean's back. He might point out how familiar the Dean was with the Protestant clergy about town. He did. It suited his occasional orthodoxy (reserved mostly to confound his critics and others much worse, like Quinlan, whom he suspected of having him under observation for humorous purposes) to disapprove of all such questionable ties, as though the Dean were entertaining heresy or at least felt kindly toward this new "interfaith" nonsense so dear to the reformed Jews and freshwater sects. It was very small game, however. And the merest brush with the Dean might bring any one of a hundred embarrassing occasions back to life, and it was easy for him to burn all over again.

When he got his dark room rigged up in the rectory the Dean had come snooping around and inquired without staying for an answer if the making of tin-types demanded that a man shun the light to the extent Father Burner appeared to. Now and again, hearkening back to this episode, the Dean referred to him as the Prince of Darkness. It did not end there. The title caught on all over the diocese. It was not the only one he had.

In reviewing a new historical work for a national Catholic magazine, he had attempted to get back at two Jesuits he knew in town, calling attention to certain tendencies—he meant nothing so gross as "order pride"—which, if not necessarily characteristic of any religious congregation within the Church, were still too often to be seen in any long view of history (which the book at hand did not pretend to take), and whereas the secular clergy, *per se,* had much to answer for, was it not true, though certainly not through any superior virtue, nor even as a consequence of their secularity—indeed he would be a fool to dream that such orders as those founded, for instance, by Saint Benedict, Saint Francis and Saint Dominic (Saint Ignatius was not instanced) were without their places in the heart of the Church, even today, when perhaps . . .

Anyway "secular" turned up once as "circular" in the review. The local Jesuits, writing in to the magazine as a group of innocent bystanders, made many subtle plays upon the unfortunate "circular" and its possible application to the person of the reviewer (their absolute unfamiliarity with the reviewer, they explained, enabled them to indulge in such conceivably dangerous whimsy). But the direction of his utterances, they thought, seemed clear, and they regretted more than they could say that the editors of an otherwise distinguished journal had found space for them, especially in wartime, or perhaps they did not rightly comprehend the course—was it something new?—set upon by the editors and if so . . .

So Father Burner was also known as "the circular priest" and he had not reviewed anything since for that magazine.

The mark of the true priest was heavy on the Dean. The mark was on Quinlan, it was on Keefe. It was on every priest he could think of, including a few on the bum and his good friend and bad companion Father Desmond. But it was not on him, not properly. They, the others, were stained with it beyond all disguise or disfigurement—indelibly, as indeed Holy Orders by its sacramental nature must stain, for keeps in this world and the one to come. "Thou art a priest forever." With him, however, it was something else and less, a mask or badge which he could and did remove at will, a temporal part to be played, almost only a doctor's or lawyer's. They, the others, would be lost in any persecution. The mark would doom them. But he, if that *dies irae* ever came—and it was every plump seminarian's apple-checked dream—could pass as the most harmless and useful of humans, a mailman, a bus rider, a husband. But would he? No. They would see. I, he would say, appearing unsought before the judging rabble, am a priest, of the order of Melchisedech. Take me. I am ready. *Deo gratias.*

Father Burner got out the money to pay and honked his horn. The woman,

coming for the bottle and tray, took his money without acknowledging the tip. She stood aside, the bottle held gingerly between offended fingers, final illustration of her lambishness, and watched him drive away. Father Burner, applying a cloven foot to the pedal, gave it the gas. He sensed the woman hoping in her simple heart to see him wreck the car and meet instant death in an unpostponed act of God.

Under the steadying influence of his stomach thrust against the wheel, the car proceeded while he searched himself for a cigarette. He passed a hitch-hiker, saw him fade out of view in the mirror overhead, gesticulate wetly in the distance. Was the son of a gun thumbing his nose? Anti-clericalism. But pray that your flight be not in the winter . . . No, wrong text: he would not run away.

The road skirted a tourist village. He wondered who stayed in those places and seemed to remember a story in one of the religious scandal sheets . . . ILLICIT LOVE in steaming red type.

A billboard cried out, "Get in the scrap and—get in the scrap!" Some of this advertising, he thought, was pretty slick. Put out probably by big New York and Chicago agencies with crack men on their staffs, fellows who had studied at *Time*. How would it be to write advertising? He knew a few things about lay-out and type faces from editing the parish paper. He had read somewhere about the best men of our time being in advertising, the air corps of business. There was room for better taste in the Catholic magazines, for someone with a name in the secular field to step in and drive out the money-changers with their trusses, corn cures, non-tangle rosary beads and crosses that glow in the dark. It was a thought.

Coming into the city limits, he glanced at his watch, but neglected to notice the time. The new gold strap got his eye. The watch itself, a priceless pyx, held the hour (time is money) sacred, like a host. He had chosen it for an ordination gift rather than the usual chalice. It took the kind of courage he had to go against the grain there.

"I'm a dirty stinker!" Father Desmond flung his arms out hard against the mattress. His fists opened on the sheet, hungry for the spikes, meek and ready. "I'm a dirty stinker, Ernest!"

Father Burner, seated deep in a red leather chair at the sick man's bedside, crossed his legs forcefully. "Now don't take on so, Father."

"Don't call me 'Father'!" Father Desmond's eyes fluttered open momentarily, but closed again on the reality of it all. "I don't deserve it. I'm a disgrace to the priesthood! I am not worthy! Lord, Lord, I am not worthy!"

A nurse entered and stuck a thermometer in Father Desmond's mouth.

Father Burner smiled at the nurse. He lit a cigarette and wondered if she understood. The chart probably bore the diagnosis "pneumonia," but if she had been a nurse very long she would know all about that. She released Father Desmond's wrist and recorded his pulse on her pad. She took the thermometer and left the room.

Father Desmond surged up in bed and flopped, turning with a wrench of the covers, on his stomach. He lay gasping like a fish out of water. Father Burner could smell it on his breath yet.

"Do you want to go to confession?"

"No! I'm not ready for it. I want to remember this time!"

"Oh, all right." It was funny, if a little tiresome, the way the Irish could exaggerate a situation. They all had access to the same two or three emotions. They all played the same battered barrel organ handed down through generations. Dying, fighting, talking, drinking, praying . . . wakes, wars, politics, pubs, church. The fates were decimated and hamstrung among them. They loved monotony.

Father Desmond, doing the poor soul uttering his last words in italics, said: "We make too good a thing out of confession, Ernest! Ever think of that, Ernest!" He wagged a nicotined finger. Some of his self-contempt seemed to overshoot its mark and include Father Burner.

Father Burner honked his lips—plutt! "Hire a hall, Ed."

Father Desmond clawed a rosary out from under his pillow.

Father Burner left.

He put the car in the garage. On the way to his room he passed voices in the Dean's office.

"Father Burner!" the Dean called through the door.

Father Burner stayed in the hallway, only peeping in, indicating numerous commitments elsewhere. Quinlan and Keefe were with the Dean.

"Apparently, Father, you failed to kill yourself." Then, for Keefe, the Dean said: "Father Burner fulfils the dream of the American hierarchy and the principle of historical localization. He's been up in his flying machine all morning."

"I didn't go up." Sullenness came and went in his voice. "It rained." He shuffled one foot, about to leave, when the Dean's left eyebrow wriggled up, warning, holding him.

"I don't believe you've had the pleasure." The Dean gave Keefe to Father Burner. "Father Keefe, sir, went through school with Father Quinlan—from the grades through the priesthood." The Dean described an arc with his breviary, dripping with ribbons, to show the passing years. Father Burner nodded.

"Well?" The Dean frowned at Father Burner. "Has the cat got your tongue, sir? Why don't you be about greeting Father O'Keefe—or Keefe is it?"

"Keefe," Keefe said.

Father Burner, caught in the old amber of his inadequacy, stepped over and shook Keefe's hand once.

Quinlan stood by and let the drama play itself out.

Keefe, smiling a curious mixture more anxiety than amusement, said: "It's a pleasure, Father."

"Same here," Father Burner said.

"Well, good day, sirs!" The Dean cracked open his breviary and began to read, lips twitching.

Father Burner waited for them in the hall. Before he could explain that he thought too much of the Dean not to humor him and that besides the old fool was out of his head, the Dean proclaimed after them: "The Chancery phoned, Father Burner. You will hear confessions there tonight. I suppose one of those Cathedral jokers lost his faculties."

Yes, Father Burner knew, it was common procedure all right for the Archbishop to confer promotions by private interview, but every time a priest got called to the Cathedral it did not mean simply that. Many received sermons and it was most likely now someone was needed to hear confessions. And still Father Burner, feeling his pocket, was glad he had not remembered to mail the letter. He would not bother to speak to Quinlan and Keefe now.

III. Night

"And for your penance say five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys and pray for my intention. And now make a good act of contrition. *Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus dimissis peccatis tuis . . .* " Father Burner swept out into the current of the prayer, stroking strongly in Latin, while the penitent, a miserable boy coming into puberty, paddled as fast as he could along the shore in English.

Finishing first, Father Burner waited for the boy to conclude. When, breathless, he did, Father Burner anointed the air and shot a whisper, "God bless you," kicking the window shut with the heel of his hand, ejecting the boy, an ear of corn hucked clean, into the world again. There was nobody on the other side of the confessional, so Father Burner turned on the signal light. A spider drowsy in his web, drugged with heat and sins, he sat waiting for the next one to be hurled into his presence by guilt ruddy ripe, as with the boy, or, as with the old ladies who come early and try to stay late, by the spiritual famine of their lives or simply the desire to tell secrets in the dark.

He held his wrist in such a way as to see the sweat gleaming in the hairs. He looked at his watch. He had been at it since seven and now it was after nine. If there were no more kneeling in his section of the Cathedral at 9:30 he could close up and have a cigarette. He was too weary to read his Office, though he had the Little Hours, Vespers and Compline still to go. It was the last minutes in the confessional that got him—the insensible end of the excursion that begins with so many sinewy sensations and good intentions to look sharp at the landscape. In the last minutes how many priests, would-be surgeons of the soul, ended as blacksmiths, hammering out absolution anyway?

A few of the Cathedral familiars still drifted around the floor. They were day and night in the shadows praying. Meeting one of them, Father Burner always wanted to get away. They were collectors of priests' blessings in a day when most priests felt ashamed to raise their hands to God outside the ceremonies. Their respect for a priest was fanatic, that of the unworldly, the martyrs, for an emissary of heaven. They were so desperately disposed to death

that the manner of dying was their greatest concern. But Father Burner had an idea there were more dull pretenders than saints among them. They inspired no unearthly feelings in him, as true sanctity was supposed to, and he felt it was all right not to like them. They spoke of God, the Blessed Virgin, of miracles, cures and visitations, as of people and items in the news, which was annoying. The Cathedral, because of its location, described by brokers as exclusive, was not so much frequented by these wretches as it would have been if more convenient to the slums. But nevertheless a few came there, like the diarrheic pigeons, also a scandal to the neighborhood, and would not go away. Father Burner, from his glancing contact with them, had concluded that body odor is the real odor of sanctity.

Through the grating now Father Burner saw the young Vicar General stop a little distance up the aisle and speak to a couple of people who were possible prospects for Father Burner. "Anyone desiring to go to confession should do so at once. In a few minutes the priests will be gone from the confessionals." He crossed to the other side of the Cathedral.

Father Burner did not like to compare his career with the Vicar General's. The Archbishop had taken the Vicar General, a younger man than Father Burner by at least fifteen years, direct from the seminary. After a period of trial as Chancellor, he was raised to his present eminence—for reasons much pondered by the clergy and more difficult to discern than those obviously accounted for by intelligence, appearance and, post facto, the loyalty consequent upon his selection over many older and possibly abler men. It was a medieval act of preference, a slap in the face to the monsignori, a rebuke to the principle of advancement by years applied elsewhere. The Vicar General had the quality of inscrutability in an ideal measure. He did not seem at all given to gossip or conspiracy or even to that owlish secrecy peculiar to secretaries and so exasperating to others. He had possibly no enemies and certainly no intimates. In time he would be a bishop unless, as was breathed wherever the Cloth gathered over food and drink, he really was "troubled with sanctity," which might lead to anything else, the cloister or insanity.

The Vicar General appeared at the door of Father Burner's compartment. "The Archbishop will see you, Father, before you leave tonight." He went up the aisle, genuflected before the main altar, opened as a gate one of the host of brass angels surrounding the sanctuary, and entered the sacristies.

Before he would let hope have its way with him, Father Burner sought to recast the expression on the Vicar General's face. He could recall nothing significant. Very probably there had been nothing to see. Then, with a rush, he permitted himself to think this was his lucky day. Already he was formulating the way he would let the news out, providing he decided not to keep it a secret for a time. He might do that. It would be delicious to go about his business until the very last minute, to savour the old aggravations and feel none of the sting, to receive the old quips and smiles with good grace and know them to be toothless. The news, once out, would fly through the diocese. Hear about Burner at Saint Pat's, Tom? Finally landed himself a parish. Yeah, I just had

it from McKenna. So I guess the A. B. wasn't so sore at the Round One after all. Well, he's just ornery enough to make a go of it.

Father Burner, earlier in the evening, had smoked a cigarette with one of the young priests attached to the Cathedral (a classmate of Quinlan's but not half the prig), stalling, hoping someone would come and say the Archbishop wanted to see him. When nothing happened except the usual small talk and introductions to a couple of missionaries stopping over, he had given up hope easily. He had seen the basis for his expectations as folly once more. It did not bother him after the fact was certain. He was amenable to any kind of finality. He had a light heart for a . . . an American of German descent. And his hopes rose higher each time and with less cause. He was a ball that bounced up only. He had kept faith. And now—his just reward.

A little surprised he had not thought of her first, he admitted his mother into the new order of things. He wanted to open the letter from her, still in his coat, and late as it was send her a wire, which would do her more good than a night's sleep. He thought of himself back in her kitchen, home from the sem for the holidays, a bruiser in a tight black suit, his feet heavy on the oven door. She was fussing at the stove and he was promising her a porcelain one as big as a house after he got his parish. But he let her know, kidding on the square, that he would be running things at the rectory. It would not be the old story of the priest taking orders from his housekeeper, even if she was his mother (seminarians, from winter evenings of shooting the bull, knew only too well the pitfalls of parish life), or as with Ed Desmond a few years ago when his father was still living with him, the old man losing his marbles one by one, butting in when people came for advice and instructions, finally coming to believe he was the one to say Mass in his son's absence, no need to get a strange priest in, and sneaking into the box to hear confessions the day before they took him away.

He would be gentle with his mother, however, even if she talked too much, as he recalled she did the last time he saw her. She was well-preserved and strong for her age and ought to be able to keep the house up. Once involved in the social life of the parish she could be a valuable agent in coping with any lay opposition, which was too often the case when a new priest took over.

He resolved to show no nervousness before the Archbishop. A trifle surprised, yes—the Archbishop must have his due—but not overly affected by good fortune. If questioned, he would display a lot of easy confidence not unaccompanied by a touch of humility, a phrase or two like "God willing" or "with the help of Almighty God and your prayers, Your Excellency." He would also not forget to look the part, reliable, casual, cool, an iceberg, only the tip of his true worth showing.

At precisely 9:30 Father Burner picked up his breviary and backed out of the stall. But then there was the scuff of a foot and the tap of one of the confessional doors closing and then, to tell him the last penitent was a woman, the scent of apple blossoms. He turned off the light, saying "Damn!" to himself, and sat down again inside. He threw back the partition and led off, "Yes?" He placed

his hand alongside his head and listened, looking down into the deeper darkness of his cassock sleeve.

"I . . . "

"Yes?" At the heart of the apple blossoms another scent bloomed: gin and vermouth.

"Bless me, Father, I . . . have sinned."

Father Burner knew this kind. They would always wait until the last moment. How they managed to get themselves into church at all, and then into the confessional, was a mystery. Sometimes liquor thawed them out. This one was evidently young, nubile. He had a feeling it was going to be adultery. He guessed it was—and up to him to get her underway.

"How long since your last confession?"

"I don't know . . . "

"Have you been away from the Church?"

"Yes."

"Are you married?"

"Yes."

"To a Catholic?"

"No."

"Protestant?"

"No."

"Jew?"

"No."

"Atheist?"

"No—nothing."

"Were you married by a priest?"

"Yes."

"How long ago was that?"

"Four years."

"Any children?"

"No."

"Practice birth control?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"Don't you know it's a crime against nature and the Church forbids it?"

"Yes."

"Don't you know that France fell because of birth control?"

"No."

"Well, it did. Was it your husband's fault?"

"You mean—the birth control?"

"Yes."

"Not wholly."

"And you've been away from the Church ever since your marriage?"

"Yes."

"Now you see why the Church is against mixed marriages. All right, go on. What else?"

"I don't know . . ."

"Is that what you came to confess?"

"No. Yes. I'm sorry, I'm afraid that's all."

"Do you have a problem?"

"I think that's all, Father."

"Remember, it is your obligation, and not mine, to examine your conscience. The task of instructing persons with regard to these delicate matters—I refer to the connubial relationship—is not an easy one. Nevertheless, since there is a grave obligation imposed by God, it cannot be shirked. If you have a problem—"

"I don't have a *problem.*"

"Remember, God never commands what is impossible and so if you make use of the sacraments regularly you have every reason to be confident that you will be able to overcome this evil successfully, with His help. I hope this is all clear to you."

"All clear."

"Then if you are heartily sorry for your sins for your penance say the rosary daily for one week and remember it is the law of the Church that you attend Mass on Sundays and holy days and receive the sacraments at least once a year. It's better to receive them often. Ask your pastor about birth control if it's still not clear to you. Or read a Catholic book on the subject. And now make a good act of contrition . . . "

Father Burner climbed the three flights of narrow stairs. He waited a moment in silence, catching his breath. He knocked on the door and was suddenly afraid its density prevented him from being heard and that he might be found standing there like a fool or a spy. But to knock again, if heard the first time, would seem importunate.

"Come in, Father."

At the other end of the long study the Archbishop sat behind an ebony desk. Father Burner waited before him as though expecting not to be asked to sit down. The only light in the room, a lamp on the desk, was so set that it kept the Archbishop's face in the dark, fell with a gentle sparkle upon his pectoral cross and was absorbed all around by the fabric of the piped cloth he wore. Father Burner's eyes came to rest upon the Archbishop's freckled hand, ringed, square and healthy.

"Be seated, Father."

"Thank you, Your Excellency."

"Oh, sit in this chair, Father." There were two chairs. Father Burner changed to the soft one. He had a suspicion that in choosing the other one he had fallen into a silly trap, that it was a game the Archbishop played with his visitors: the innocent ones, seeing no issue, would take the soft chair, because handier; the guilty would go a step out of their way to take the hard one. "I called Saint Patrick's this morning, Father, but you were . . . out."

"I was visiting Father Desmond, Your Excellency,"

"Father Desmond . . . "

"He's in the hospital."

"I know. Friend of his, are you, Father?"

"No, Your Excellency. Well"—Father Burner waited for the cock to crow the third time—"yes, I *know* the man." At once he regretted the scriptural complexion of the words and wondered if it were possible for the Archbishop not to be thinking of the earlier betrayal.

"It was good of you to visit Father Desmond, especially since you are not close to him. I hope he is better, Father."

"He is, Your Excellency."

The Archbishop got up and went across the room to a cabinet. "Will you have a little glass of wine, Father?"

"No. No, thanks, Your Excellency." Immediately he realized it could be another trap and, if so, he was caught again.

"Then I'll have a drop . . . *solus*." The Archbishop poured a glass and brought it back to the desk. "A little wine for the stomach's sake, Father."

Father Burner, not sure what he was expected to say to that, nodded gravely and said, "Yes, Your Excellency." He had seen that the Archbishop wore carpet slippers and that they had holes in both toes.

"But perhaps you've read Saint Bernard, Father, and recall where he says we priests remember well enough the apostolic counsel to use wine, but overlook the adjective 'little'."

"I must confess I haven't read Saint Bernard lately, Your Excellency." Father Burner believed this was somehow in his favor. "Since seminary, in fact."

"Not all priests, Father, have need of him. A hard saint . . . for hardened sinners. What is your estimate of Saint Paul?"

Father Burner felt familiar ground under his feet at last. There were the Pauline and Petrine factions—a futile business, he thought—but he knew where the Archbishop stood and exclaimed: "One of the greatest—"

"Really! So many young men today consider him . . . a bore. It's always the deep-breathing ones, I notice. They say he cuts it too fine."

"I've never thought so, Your Excellency."

"Indeed? Well, it's a question I like to ask my priests. Perhaps you knew that."

"No, I didn't, Your Excellency."

"So much the better then . . . but I see you appraising the melodeon, Father. Are you musical?"

"Not at all, Your Excellency. Violin lessons as a child." Father Burner laughed quickly, as though it were nothing.

"But you didn't go on with them?"

"No, Your Excellency." He did not mean it to sound as sad as it came out.

"What a pity."

"No great loss, Your Excellency."

"You are too . . . modest, Father. But perhaps the violin was not your instrument."

"I guess it wasn't, Your Excellency." Father Burner laughed out too loud.

"And you have the choir at Saint Patrick's, Father?"

"Not this year, Your Excellency. Father Quinlan has it."

"Now I recall . . . "

"Yes." So far as he was concerned, and there were plenty of others who thought so too, Quinlan had played hell with the choir, canning all the women, some of them members for fifteen and twenty years, a couple even longer and practically living for it, and none of them as bad as Quinlan said. The liturgical stuff that Quinlan tried to pull off was all right in monasteries, where they had the time to train for it, but in a parish it sounded stodgy to ears used to the radio and split up the activity along sexual lines, which was really old hat in the modern world. The Dean liked it though. He called it "honest" and eulogized the men from the pulpit—not a sign that he heard how they brayed and whinnied and just gave out or failed to start—and each time it happened ladies in the congregation were sick and upset for days afterward, for he inevitably ended by attacking women, pants, cocktails, communism, cigarettes and running around half naked. The women looked at the men in the choir, all pretty in surplices, and said to themselves they knew plenty about some of them and what they had done to some women.

"He's tried a little Gregorian, hasn't he—Father Quinlan?"

"Yes, Your Excellency," Father Burner said. "He has."

"Would you say it's been a success—or perhaps I should ask you first if you care for Gregorian, Father."

"Oh, yes, Your Excellency. Very much."

"Many, I know, don't . . . I've been told our chant sounds like a wild bull in a red barn or consumptives coughing into a bottle, but I will have it in the Cathedral, Father. Other places, I am aware, have done well with . . . light opera."

Father Burner frowned.

"We are told the people prefer and understand it. But at the risk of seeming reactionary, a fate my office prevents me from escaping in any event, I say we spend more time listening to the voice of the people than is good for either it or us. We have been too generous with our ears, Father. We have handed over our tongues also. When they are restored to us I wonder if we shall not find our ears more itching than before and our tongues more tied than ever."

Father Burner nodded in the affirmative.

"We are now entering the whale's tail, Father. We must go back the way we came in." The Archbishop lifted the lid of the humidor on the desk. "Will you smoke, Father?"

"No, thanks, Your Excellency."

The Archbishop let the lid drop. "Today there are few saints, fewer sinners and everybody is already saved. We are all heroes in search of an underdog. As for villains, the classic kind with no illusions about themselves, they are . . . extinct. The very devil, for instance, where the devil is the devil today, Father?"

Father Burner, as the Archbishop continued to look at him, bit his lips for

the answer, secretly injured that he should be expected to know, bewildered even as the children he toyed with in catechism.

The Archbishop smiled, but Father Burner was not sure at what, whether at him or what had been said. "Did you see, Father, where our brother Bishop Buckles said Hitler remains the one power on earth against the Church?"

Yes, Father Burner remembered seeing it in the paper; it was the sort of thing that kept Quinlan talking for days. "I did, Your Excellency."

"Alas, poor Buckles! He's a better croquet player than that." The Archbishop's hands unclasped suddenly and fell upon his memo pad. He tore off about a week and seemed to feel better for it. His hands, with no hint of violence about them now, came together again. "We look hard to the right and left, Father. It is rather to the center, I think, we should look, to ourselves, the devil in us."

Father Burner knew the cue for humility when he heard it. "Yes, Your Excellency."

With his chubby fingers the Archbishop made a steeple that was more like a dome. His eyes were reading the memo. "For instance, Father, I sometimes appear at banquets—when they can't line up a good foreign correspondent—banquets at which the poor are never present and at which I am unfailingly confronted by someone exceedingly well off who is moved to inform me that 'religion' is a great consolation to him. Opium, rather, I always think, perhaps wrongfully and borrowing a word from one of our late competitors, which is most imprudent of me, a bishop."

The Archbishop opened a drawer and drew out a sheet of paper and an envelope. "Yes, the rich have souls," he said softly, answering an imaginary objection which happened to be Father Burner's. "But if they had Christ they would not be themselves, that is to say, rich."

"Very true, Your Excellency," Father Burner said.

The Archbishop faced sideways to use an old typewriter. "And likewise, lest we forget, we would not be ourselves, that is to say—what? For we square the circle beautifully in almost every country on earth. We bring neither peace nor a sword. The rich give us money. We give them consolation and make of the eye of the needle a gate. Together we try to reduce the Church, the Bride of Christ, to a streetwalker." The Archbishop rattled the paper, Father Burner's future, into place and rolled it crookedly into the typewriter. "Unfortunately for us, it doesn't end there. The penance will not be shared so equitably. Your Christian name, Father, is—?"

"Ernest, Your Excellency."

The Archbishop typed several words and stopped, looking over at Father Burner. "I can't call to mind a single Saint Ernest, Father. Can you help me?"

"There were two, I believe, Your Excellency, but Butler leaves them out of his *Lives*."

"They would be German saints, Father?"

"Yes, Your Excellency. There was one an abbot and the other an archbishop."

"If Butler had been Irish, as the name has come to indicate, I'd say that's an Irishman for you, Father. He does not forget to include a power of Irish saints." The Archbishop was Irish himself. Father Burner begged to differ with him, believing here was a wrong deliberately set up for him to right. "I am not Irish myself, Your Excellency, but some of my best friends are."

"Tut, tut, Father. Such tolerance will be the death of you." The Archbishop, typing a few words, removed the paper, signed it and placed it in the envelope. He got up and took down a book from the shelves. He flipped it open, glanced through several pages and returned it to its place. "No Ernests in Baring-Gould either. Well, Father, it looks as if you have a clear field."

The Archbishop came from behind the desk and Father Burner, knowing the interview was over, rose. The Archbishop handed him the envelope. Father Burner stuffed it hastily in his pocket and knelt, the really important thing, to kiss the Archbishop's ring and receive his blessing. They walked together toward the door.

"Do you care for pictures, Father?"

"Oh, yes, Your Excellency."

The Archbishop, touching him lightly on the arm, stopped before a reproduction of Raphael's Sistine Madonna. "There is a good peasant woman, Father, and a nice fat baby." Father Burner nodded his appreciation. "She could be Our Blessed Mother, Father, though I doubt it. There is no question about the baby. He is not Christ." The Archbishop moved to another picture. "Rembrandt had the right idea, Father. See the gentleman pushing Christ up on the cross? That is Rembrandt, a self portrait." Father Burner thought of some of the stories about the Archbishop, that he slept on a cot, stood in line with the people sometimes to go to confession, that he fasted on alternate days the year round. Father Burner was thankful for such men as the Archbishop. "But here is Christ, Father." This time it was a glassy-eyed Christ whose head lay against the rough wood of the cross he was carrying. "That is Christ, Father. The Greek painted Our Saviour."

The Archbishop opened the door for Father Burner, saying, "And, Father, you will please not open the envelope until after your Mass tomorrow."

Father Burner went swiftly down the stairs. Before he got into his car he looked up at the Cathedral. He could scarcely see the cross glowing on the dome. It seemed as far away as the stars. The cross needed a brighter light or the dome ought to be painted gold and lit up like the state capitol, so people would see it. He drove a couple of blocks down the street, pulled up to the curb, opened the envelope, which had not been sealed, and read: "You will report on August 8 to the Reverend Michael Furlong, to begin your duties on that day as his assistant. I trust that in your new appointment you will find not peace but a sword."

GEORGE ANTHONY:

Funeral Sonnet

My father's death left me in debt
to snot-eyed cemetery beggars stain
his winter mirrors.
The pimpled grave
spread sail on mustard sea.
Locked eyes ferment
in caves. Deny. Deny O Rock thou petrine
bone unfleshed unguarded in the curdled wave.
My father's debt left me in death
at home. Idiots picked me clean.

Interment is prepared for early spring
before the gasping Easter sentinel
can hang his harlequin cassock in the sun.
Underground chimeras of onion swell.
And on the camphor cedar tree there swing
my seedling Satan and my father's skeleton.

Poor Relation

My brother praises strangers when
Their eyes become detached and glow
Unframed by faces. Strangers know
What to remember when my sister sends
Them messengers with roses.

My brother is that famous man
I once saw in a bathtub. He can
Explain why I must entertain
Terriers and the terriers' lice.
My brother laughs like the play of dice.

My salted sister in disguise
Glistens. Naked she could surprise
The neighbors, but she hides in a locket
Wreathed in the curl of her girlhood frolic
While voices creep like hands in your pocket.

Doxy

Age is the madam that the young
may trot. Spice boys can lock tomorrow
in a box while old men squat
to chuckle. Every minute brings
the feather makes the young one jump.

Age is the doxy to the foxy
godling in my corner. Face
and stage is all my mourning lacks.
My falsetto poxy echo
plays the Jill behind my back.

Dieu que le son du cor est triste

The muted cornet
announces my running harefoot escape
while staring amazement in darkness
hums like a hornet.

Through avenues
of cradling correspondences—
sleeping willows and Roman widows
who nightly choose

A marble hero—
I follow the raddling brush of my fox
as an unforgetting ghost his folly
through liquid meadow.

O sing and sing
regrets and lullabies among
our Italies. The mandrake frets
the sleeping king.

ERIC BENTLEY:

What Is Epic Theatre?

When Francis Fergusson said that the more original playwrights of the 'twenties "start completely afresh" he listed only anti-naturalists. The anti-naturalists always get the credit for originality. Actually the naturalists were just as much in revolt. In a sense they were twice as much in revolt since they rejected not only the anti-naturalistic styles—such as Expressionism—but the established Naturalistic styles of the 'nineties. They wanted to be more naturalistic still.

Of all the attempts to bring onto the stage crude, natural life, unembellished by histrionics, Epic Theatre is probably the most far-reaching. And though the ideas of Epic may be known in America, if at all, by way of certain productions of the Federal Theatre, by way of certain particular ideas such as the Living Newspapers in which Arthur Arent presented the current news by means of actors, or by way of certain things in Marc Blitzstein, Paul Green, Thornton Wilder, it is still necessary to go back to some of the main sources of these phenomena, not because they are the sources but because they are the purest and often the best examples of the genre. It is necessary, in short, to investigate the work of Bertolt Brecht, the unacknowledged fountainhead of so much in the theatre of the past twenty years. For even the best imitations of Brecht—such as the rather sketchy extravaganzas of W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood—are no index to the original.

The seedbed of Epic Drama was that strange, exciting, impermanent state of affairs—the culture of the Weimar Republic. It began with the first flush of the new modernism after the First World War. Even before that critics had spoken of the *Episierung des Dramas* when Gerhart Hauptmann wrote his episodic *Die Weber*. The Naturalism of the 'nineties was a first step towards Epic. It began the break-up of the "well-made" play and substituted loosely connected narrative. The three-volume play *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit,* written by the great Viennese satirist Karl Kraus during the First World War, is a giant Epic Drama of war and peace. When the early 'twenties are thoroughly chronicled many kindred phenomena will be found.

One therefore takes with a pinch of salt the assumption made by Erwin Piscator in his book *Das politische Theater* that Epic Theatre was invented by him. But I do not mean to belittle his services to the theatre. His work illustrates better than anything else the "starting completely afresh" which the naturalistic theatre, the theatre of the outer world, undertook at the same time as the theatre of the inner world. To comprehend just how far the repudiation of the play, the unified drama, could go in favor of these new Epic slices of life, one must follow Piscator's own account.

According to *Das politische Theater* the first Epic drama was a production

of Piscator's in 1924 at which he used (in addition to actors) films and placards. There is a record in the book of another 1924 production entitled *Revue Roter Rummel* which Piscator composed and executed with one Gasbarra, "whom," he writes, "the Party had sent me." An eye-witness account is provided:

> It was a pilgrimage for the masses. As we approached, hundreds were standing in the street and vainly trying to get in. Workers exchanged blows to get seats. In the hall everything full and jampacked. The air enough to make you faint. But faces beamed—on fire for the start of the production. Music. The lights go out. Silence. In the audience two men are quarreling. People are shocked. The dispute continues in the gangway. The footlights are switched on and the disputants appear before the curtain. They are two workmen talking about their situation. A Gentleman in a top hat steps up. Bourgeois. He has his own Weltanschauung and invites the disputants to spend an evening with him. Up with the curtain! First scene. Now it goes snip snap. Ackerstrasse—Kurfuerstendamm. Tenements—Cocktail lounges. Porter resplendent in blue and gold—a begging war cripple. Fat paunch and thick watch chain. Match vendors and collectors of cigaret stubs. Swastika—Vehm murderers—Was maçhst du mit dem Knie—Heil dir im Siegerkranz [i. e. a jazz song followed by a national anthem]. Between the scenes: Screen, movie, statistics, pictures! More scenes. The begging war veteran is thrown out by the porter. A crowd gathers in front of the place. Workmen rush in and destroy the lounges. The audience cooperates. What a whistling, shouting, milling, ... unforgettable!

This is crude stuff. But there is method in Piscator's callowness. Let us look at the program of *Trotz Alledem,* 1925, when "the Communist Party told us to arrange a production in the Grosses Schauspielhaus on the Berlin Party Day." This production was an historical review in twenty-four scenes with films in between:

> Scene I: Berlin expecting war. Potsdam Square.
> Scene II: Meeting of the Social Democratic Section of the Reichstag, July 25, 1914.
> Scene III: In the Kaiser's Castle, Berlin, August 1, 1914 . . . .

After the final scene comes "the rising of the proletariat: Liebknecht lives!" and a chorus in which the audience joins. Although the whole thing is more of a demonstration than a drama, the temper and the method of a new realism—narrative realism—is here suggested. This is one of Brecht's starting points. Others are indicated in Piscator's perhaps rather bumptious remarks, directed against both Expressionism and its contrary: "Not man's relation to himself, not his relation to God, but his relation to society is the main issue." And again: "No longer the individual with his private, personal destiny, but the age itself, the destiny of the masses, is the heroic factor of the new dramaturgy." Above all: "Authors must learn to grasp the material in all its factuality, the drama of the great simple phenomena of life. The theatre demands naive, direct, uncomplicated, unpsychological effects."

One should acknowledge that Piscator failed, as much as Reinhardt, to make headway beyond a certain point. He continued the unhappy tradition

of making the director—*i.e.,* himself—the central figure in the theatre. While at one moment he pleads that this is because he cannot find any good dramatists, at another he registers a determination not to accept completed script, but to hand out material to authors, and have them dramatize it along with him in the theatre. This sounds chummy, but it would be really mischievous if the dramatist happened to be good. Piscator's book closes with the avowal that the theatre has to be made over in its outlook, its dramaturgy, its architecture, and its technique but that this cannot be done before the Revolution. The masses under capitalism evidently don't wish to pay for a Piscator theatre, and he is on the rocks just as if he had frankly addressed himself to the intelligentsia . . .

Today Piscator's work is interesting chiefly as a prelude to Brecht.

The root idea of Brecht's Epic Drama is expressed in the name. Of the three types of literature—epic, dramatic, and lyric—the first two are to be fused, and Brecht has no objection to admitting the lyrical element too. This is against all the laws of the elders. Most older critics insisted on keeping the three types separate just as the college-educated movie critics today believe that the movies should be epic and the drama dramatic. There have been those who favor separation of the genres; there have also been those who favor mingling. In this realm too racial purity and cross-fertilization are rival allegiances. There have long been two types of dramatic structure: the open, diffuse play which starts early in the narrative and proceeds through it in many scenes and, on the other hand, the closed, concentrated play which has a late point of attack and lets us look back on the story from its climax—which is the play. In modern times we have been so schooled to respect the latter method—the method of Scribe, Dumas and Ibsen—that it is regarded as "dramatic method" *pur sang.* Teachers of playwriting teach it as such. Critics of the novel have it in mind when they write of the dramatic type of novel. Indeed when we find a distinguished scholar writing that it was impudent of Shakespeare not to adopt the method it is time to call a halt. Shakespeare's Elizabethan predecessors shared the impudence, and if the Greeks used the late point of attack they certainly had little else of the "dramatic method" which is found in its entirety only in the modern well-made play and—perhaps—in French classical tragedy. Most dramatic masterpieces are therefore, by this criterion, undramatic. The Greeks and the French use long Epic narrations. Shakespeare's open structure is copied by all his imitators from Goethe to Hugo. Brecht's Epic procedure is this open structure.

But Epic Drama is more than a particular style of architecture. It drops other features of the Ibsenite play. The latter was built around a centre, a crisis. Its unfolding was a gathering of clouds, its climax a thunderclap. With this pattern goes identification of the spectator with a protagonist, which presupposes a high degree of *illusion* as to his reality and a high degree of *suspense* in the telling of the tale. In the last century the process of ever greater and greater concentration proceeded as far as Strindberg's *Creditors* and *Miss Julia,* of which latter Strindberg wrote that he had eliminated all act and scene divisions because: ". . . I have come to fear that our decreasing capacity for

illusion might be unfavorably affected by intermissions during which the spectator would have time to reflect and to get away from the suggestive influence of the author-hypnotist." This pattern has not been much affected by modern experiments prior to Brecht. Expressionism abandons natural appearance by attempts to elicit an even more compelling drive of sympathetic emotion. It is obvious that dream and nightmare plays intensify the emotional participation of the audience in the play. We can best see the contrast between Epic Theatre and earlier experimentalism by keeping the theory of Epic in mind while reading Nicholas Evreinov's account of his Monodrama, an experimental form often regarded as the furthest departure from orthodoxy, in which there is only one character to a play:

> The task of monodrama is to carry the spectator to the very stage so that he will feel that he is acting himself . . . The 'I' (the acting character) is a bridge from the auditorium to the stage . . . The spectator must know from the program with whom the author invites him to have a common life, in whose image he himself must appear. . . . Monodrama forces every one of the spectators to enter the situation of the acting character, to live his life, that is to say, to feel as he does and through illusion to think as he does . . . in the end it must be clear to the dramatist that if he wishes to represent the life of the spirit, he must deal not with external realities but with the internal reflections of the real objects, because for the psychology of a given person his subjective perception of the real object is important but not the object in a relation indifferent to him . . .

Evreinov's Monodrama (in which there is only one character whose inner life is the subject of the play) is the furthest possible reach of the drama of individual psychology, the spirit, the subjective element, and it is coupled with a higher degree of identification than had ever before been demanded. If this "theatre of myself" is at one extreme, Brecht is at the other. The following chart, made by Brecht himself, lets us see this more clearly:

The conventional theatre of today:	The Epic Theatre:
the stage embodies a sequence of events	the stage narrates the sequence
involves the spectator in an action and	makes him an observer but
uses up his energy (will to action)	awakens his energy
allows him feelings	demands decisions from him
communicates experiences	communicates pieces of knowledge
spectator is brought into an action	is placed in front of an action
is plied with suggestion	with arguments
sensations are preserved	till they become insights
man is given as a known quantity	man an object of investigation
man unalterable	alterable and altering
tense interest in the outcome	tense interest in what happens
one scene exists for another	each scene exists for itself
linear course of events	curved course of events
natura non facit saltus	facit saltus
the world is what it is	the world is what it is becoming
what man should	what man must
his instincts	his reasons
thought determines reality	social reality determines thought

The facts before us already are sufficient to indicate that Epic Theatre is in some sense naturalistic—and is also a radical departure from most familiar types of drama. If Wagnerism is behind all the anti-naturalistic dramaturgies, as I believe it to be, it is interesting that in his essay on opera Brecht protests against the *Schmelzprozess* by which Wagnerism merges one art with another, thus forfeiting the individuality of each. He demands singers who will act and narrate the piece and not pour forth their souls "which," he says, "are a private matter." For the Brechtian Epic Opera the orchestra will be small and disciplined. It is distinguished from Wagnerian opera as follows:

Wagnerism:	Epic Opera:
the music enlivens	the music communicates
music heightening the text	music expounding the test
music asserting the text	music taking the text for granted
music illustrating	music taking a stand
music painting the psychic situation	music indicating behavior

The fact that Brecht is not a Wagnerite does not of course make him a Zolaist. Zola had been known for his emphasis on determinism by heredity and environment and, secondarily, for a theory of presentation which in the theatre was the highest degree of realism ever attained. Indeed dramatic critics often mean by the term Naturalism nothing more than a highly realistic staging in which everything is done to create the illusion that "a play is a slice of life." Real furniture and real beer replaced canvas and empty glasses. On the stage actors imitated the speech and deportment of men in the street. Playwrights cooperated by eliminating soliloquies, asides, songs, and other "interruptions."

By these tests Brecht is not a Naturalist at all. Epic staging and acting are not realistic in the manner of Antoine. They seek to destroy precisely the *illusion* of actuality which was the latter's chief aim. The Epic stage, accordingly, is "artificial." Instead of assembling on the stage real rooms, buildings, and their furniture, it uses slides, charts, film projections, simultaneous scenes, and tableaux rolled across the stage on treadmills. Brechtian acting, like Pirandellian acting, is anti-illusory. The actor must not pretend to *be* the character. He must play the role from the outside, not—as the Expressionists demanded—in a stylized and unindividual manner, but with as much finesse as Stanislavsky himself could have wished. The playwright for his part brings back choric commentary by introducing narrators, songs, soliloquies, and other "interruptive" devices.

Brecht is not a strict Naturalist; but he is a naturalist in the broader sense. He wishes to be as faithful as possible to objective facts. Precisely because he has abandoned the "fourth wall theory" of presentation, which contrary to the conscious intention of its upholders tended to make a dream-world of reality, Brecht is able to be more, not less, of a Naturalist than the Zola of *Thérèse Raquin*. Zola's "Naturalistic theatre" dedicated to actuality, was a theatre of illusion, phantasmagoria,—it might even be maintained—escape. It differed from its ostensible opposite New Romanticism in that one escaped to an ugly

not to a beautiful island. Now the "unrealistic" elements in Epic staging are all devoted to imparting a greater sense of the actual world. They say to the audience: "The actual world exists and it is our subject. But this play and this stage are not it." Zolaism, by saying, "The action on the stage is not a play at all but real life," created what an Epic dramatist would consider a sophisticated form of illusionism, unnaturalness, and theatricality.

But the genus naturalism is a much broader thing than the species of the 'nineties. Negatively in its repudiation of the realm of dream and subjectivity, positively in its primary concern with the external, social world and the forces that move it, Epic Drama is in the broad tradition that I have called naturalism. If Expressionism and the New Romanticism were a rebound from Zolaist Naturalism, Epic Drama was a rebound from the New Romanticism and Expressionism. If the earlier Naturalism came in with the discovery of "the true meaning of life" in Darwinist science, the later Epic Drama came in with the discovery of the true meaning of life in Marxist science. "Today," says Brecht, "when the human being must be grasped as the totality of social relationships only the Epic form can enable the dramatist to find a comprehensive image of the world. The individual, precisely the flesh and blood individual, can be understood only by way of the processes wherein and whereby he exists. The new dramaturgy must acquire a form which will not make use of throbbing suspense but will have a suspense in the relationship of its scenes which will charge each other with tension. This form will therefore be anything but a stringing together of scenes such as we find in revues."

Only the Epic form will do: Like his polar opposite, Cocteau, who says that "pure" theatre should be the only kind, Brecht mars his very interesting suggestions with dogmatism and over-simplification. His defense of the theatre of objectivity, for instance, is as ingenuous as Piscator's. In one essay he goes so far as to complain of the fact that "until now the theatre has been a medium for the self-expression of the artist." Unlike the language of the scientist "dramatic imagery has sought rather to construct an independent world of emotion—to organize subjective sensations." Brecht assumes that the drama of subjectivity is very easy to manage: "for this purpose neither accuracy nor responsibility is required." Luckily, after all these centuries of inaccuracy and irresponsibility, salvation is at hand:

> In recent decades, however, a new kind of theatre has developed—one which sets itself the goal of an accurate picture of the world . . . The artist who belongs to this theatre no longer attempts to create his own world . . . His purpose is to create images informative of the [external] world rather than of himself . . . The artist must refashion his whole method to suit a new purpose.
>
> The visionary ignores discoveries made by others; the desire for experiment is not among the mental traits of the seer. Unlike the visionary and the seer, the artist in pursuit of a new goal finds no subliminal apparatus ready to serve him. The inner eyes has never needed microscope or telescope. The outer eye needs both.

Brecht assumes here that the individual self is only a repulsive "subliminal apparatus," a source of foolish visions and dangerous illusions. Even if it were, that would be no reason for ignoring it; if the artist's mind is so strange a beast it should be put under close observation. Obviously Brecht is either parroting the clap-trap of scientism or giving vent to that hatred of the self which is the root of all too much of the altruism and social conscience of our time. Even more than Bernard Shaw, Brecht habitually overstates any proposition that is serviceable to his art. Such a passage as I have just quoted should in itself be proof that Epic theory cannot always be taken literally or even seriously. It does not even square with Brecht's practice. He does not eliminate stage-illusion and suspense; he only reduces their importance. Sympathy and identification with the characters are not eliminated; they are counterpoised by deliberate distancing.

"The effect of genius," said Longinus, two thousand years ago, "is not to persuade or convince the audience, but rather to transport them out of themselves . . . The object of poetry is to enthrall." Brecht says: "I do not like plays to contain pathetic overtones, they must be convincing like court pleas. The main thing is to teach the spectator to reach a verdict." Well: it is legitimate that some of the purposes of poetry should change in two thousand years, but one doubts if they have really changed as much as Brecht suggests. Certainly the modern drama—as we have amply seen—has been much more inclined to persuade and convince than was pre-modern drama, nor am I one of those who regret it. But there is no need to exaggerate. Like Shaw's criticism of Shakespeare, Brecht's denunciation of pathetic overtones has more significance as an attack on contemporary sentimentalism than it has literal truth. But it is not really necessary to pulverize Euripides, Shakespeare, and Racine—the masters of pathetic overtone—in order to scold Sudermann and Barrie.

The disproof of Brecht's theory is Brecht's practice. His art makes up for his criticism. In his art there is stage-illusion, suspense, sympathy, identification. The audience is enthralled and—most important of all—the highly personal genius of Brecht finds expression. I do not mean that Brecht and Zola are in the end as subjective as Sartre and Evreinov. That would be to replace over-statement with over-statement. No work of art is wholly "objective" or wholly "subjective." It is a matter of emphasis. In his theoretic pronouncements Brecht carries the naturalistic emphasis to an impossible extreme—impossible, that is, to practice. It follows that his practice must be either a catalogue of failures or that it is inconsistent with the theory. The latter is the truth. Brecht is a naturalist but non-naturalistic elements are of more and more importance as his art develops.

The dramatic art of Brecht has so far gone through four phases. In the first, his apprenticeship, he took up the problems of the theatre where Strindberg and Wedekind left them—that is to say, he had to think through the whole question of form almost from scratch. To help himself in this task he studied, and made adaptations from Chinese, Elizabethan, and Spanish plays; and before the end of the 'twenties he had written four outstanding original works.

Two were plays in a style of highly personal naturalism, two were operettas equally idiosyncratic. Only the last of all these to be written—his version of the *Beggar's Opera*[1]—is fully developed Epic theatre. Hence it is the culmination of Brecht's first period.

If the first phase is cynical and brilliant and very much of the 'twenties, the second is stark and solemn and very much of the 'thirties. If the works of the 'twenties permitted hostile critics to dismiss Brecht as a cabaret wit, the works of the 'thirties permitted them to dismiss him an "artist in uniform," a "minstrel of the GPU." Though Brecht's bleakest, barrenest works belong to this period, so also does his *Saint Joan of the Stockyards,*[2] a rich satire, and a kind of prelude to the third phase, the first years of exile from Germany, during which Brecht wrote two full-scale dramatic fantasies about the Nazi movement. But probably the major works of the middle 'thirties are *Mother Courage and Her Sons* and *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich.*[3] In the first Brecht withdrew from the current struggle to compose another Epic play in verse and prose, in song and monosyllable conversation, a sardonic and circumstantial record of the process of war. In *Fear and Misery* Brecht and the Third Reich are for the first time face to face. The title is a parody of Balzac's *Glory and Misery of the Courtesans,* and the work itself—a portrait of one cell after another in the social organism—is a twentieth-century *comédie humaine* in miniature. In a series of over twenty scenes, unconnected by characters or plot, connected only by theme, the people of Hitler's Germany are revealed. Between the scenes a choric voice is heard and (in the shorter stage version) a group of Nazi soldiers sings Brecht's words to the tune of their party hymn at the beginning and end of each act.

Though the narrative structure, the interruptions, and many other technical devices are Epic, one of Brecht's most friendly critics has suggested that the play in general need not be taken as Epic but can be interpreted as good, orthodox drama. Certainly the more mature experimentalism of this play is able to draw on established methods much more than could the severe Epic plays in which Brecht first worked out his theories. Such a scene as "The Jewish Wife" is in the nineteenth-century tradition and would have been accepted by Antoine for the Theatre Libre. *Misery and Fear* is the fullest of the plays of the 'thirties. Its new use of realism, of strong situation, tableau, innuendo, charade, should prove to those who feared the contrary that Brecht is willing not only to exclude established forms and ideas from his theatre but to bring them back again in new ways.

But enough of cataloguing. When we come to Brecht's latest phase, the phase of the nineteen-forties, I have to assume that my readers have not seen or read the plays. I accordingly propose to round out this essay with two rather detailed exegeses.

Like the two plays of Sartre the two most interesting plays of Brecht's latest

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[1]English version (unpublished) by Desmond I. Vesey.
[2]English version (unpublished) by Frank Jones.
[3]English versions, by H. R. Hays and myself respectively, published by New Directions.

manner—*The Good Woman of Sezuan* and *The Circle of Chalk*—are moralities "showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids." They are both parables in eastern settings and somewhat in the manner of Chinese theatre. Both are Epic in their dramaturgy: the main story is framed, in one play by a singer and a chorus who act as narrators, in the other by alternate scenes in which the gods discuss the action. From time to time characters talk directly to the audience. There is suspense, but it is minimized. Each scene is interesting for itself and not as preparation . . .

Der gute Mensch von Sezuan (The Good Woman of Sezuan) tells how three of the gods come down to earth to learn if there is any goodness in human beings. They begin by looking for someone hospitable enough to offer them a night's lodging, and find nobody but the little Chinese prostitute Shen Te. She proves indeed to be the only human being that is thoroughly good, and the rest of the story is that of her life after the gods set her up in a little store with money of her own.

Very soon Shen Te finds herself imposed upon by the unscrupulous poor. A family of eight dumps itself on her doorstep. She finds that the store is in a bad location, that the rent is too high, that the tradesmen swindle her. Who is to pay her bills? Shen Te is hustled by her housemates into inventing a cousin named Shui Ta who is to settle her debts. Our surprise when a Shui Ta arrives and does so is mitigated by the discovery (made by the audience only) that he is Shen Te wearing a mask. At first Shui Ta is intended to be only a temporary helper. When he arranges for the marriage of Shen Te to the wealthy banker Shu Fu it seems that his services can be dispensed with. But no. The young flier Yang Sun, too poor to pursue the art of flying, unable to get a job, is about to hang himself from a willow tree when Shen Te sees him and falls in love. They agree to marry. Although Shui Ta discovers that Yang is marrying chiefly for money Shen Te does not seem able to resist him. Only at the last moment, when she is certain that Yang Sun will prevent her paying her debts in order to satisfy his ambitions with her money, does she draw back.

Returning to meet her monetary needs alone, and finding herself pregnant, Shen Te again calls upon Shui Ta who rapidly becomes a Tobacco King, a successful capitalist paying starvation wages and overcrowding the living quarters of his workers. Beginning at the bottom Yang Sun works his way up in Shui Ta's factory until he is a manager. Meanwhile the waistline of Shui Ta is seen to expand. Yang Sun hears a womans' sobbing in Shui Ta's room and feels sure that Shen Te is imprisoned there. Shui Ta is brought before a court of justice to account for his cousin's disappearance.

In the final scene of the play the three gods act as Shui Ta's judges. Shen Te recognizes them. Asking for the court to be cleared she removes her mask and confesses all. But the judges are not angry. They are glad to find their one good human being again:

> THE FIRST GOD. Say no more unhappy woman! What are we to think,
> we who are so glad to have found you again!

SHEN TE. But I must tell you that I am the bad man whose misdeeds have been reported to you by everybody here!

THE FIRST GOD. The good man whose good deeds have been reported by everybody!

SHEN TE. No, the bad man too![4]

Shen Te is desperate. How is she to go on living? What about her baby? The gods are not worried. "Only be good and all will be well," is their parting counsel. Hymning the praises of the good woman of Sezuan they ascend into heaven on a pink cloud.

In other words it is impossible to be good, in the traditional sense of altruistic, gentle, loving, in a world that lives by egoism, rapacity, and hate. The Christian argues: 'You can't change the world. All you can do is to exercise the Christian virtues in your own small circle." Brecht replies: "This is topsy-turvy reasoning. Your small circle is no circle but a segment of a large circle. The segment has no independence. Only by altering the world can goodness become practical." Shen Te wished to be kind. But on one occasion she finds herself allowing an old couple to be ruined because she does not pay her debt to them. On another occasion she will not help a poor man to find redress of an injury wilfully inflicted by the Barber Shu Fu because at the time she is trying to win Shu Fu's lucrative hand. In order to survive, the good girl needs the assistance of the brutal exploiter. And when she appeals to the gods she receives as answer: "Are we to confess that our laws are lethal? Are we to repudiate our laws? Never! Is the world to be changed? How? By whom? No: everything is all right."

The theme of *The Good Woman of Sezuan* is not, and is not meant to be, hard to grasp. Clarity is the first requisite of didacticism. The amazing thing is the way Brecht makes his lessons into works of art. Obviously there were many ways of bungling the treatment of the Sezuan story. It could lose force through being too quaint and charming as so many modern fantasies do. It could fall short of art if the allegory were too earnest and ponderous or if the propaganda were too eager and importunate. Brecht manages to escape all these pitfalls, and the result is something entirely new in didactic theatre. Although the message is firm and sharp it is not coaxed into us by pathos or thrown at us in anger. It is worked out by craftsmanship, that is, by Epic technique and Brechtian genius. The dialogue, delicate but not quaint, strong but not heavy, poetic but not decorative, is diversified with songs such as only Brecht could write, using a manner which has ripened down the years since his *Beggar's Opera*. The mock naiveté, the speeches to audience, the witty exchanges, the Chinese conventions go to make a rich texture and a rapid tempo. The big scenes in the grand manner—such as the wedding (which never takes place) of Shen Te and the final trial scene—give the piece a dignity and a spaciousness that Brecht had perhaps only once before achieved—in his *Galileo*.[5]

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[4]My own *ad hoc* translation.

[5]English version (unpublished) by Desmond I. Vesey.

Der Kreidekreis (The Circle of Chalk) opens with a discussion of the rights to a piece of land between two groups of Russians who return to it after the Nazis have been driven out. The question is: upon what principle should the matter be settled? The main action of the play is an answer to the question.

During a civil war the Governor's baby is abandoned by its mother (who is more interested in saving her fine clothes) and brought up by the servant girl Grusche. Like Shen Te, Grusche is driven into wrong actions by sheer necessity. To guarantee the child a respectable home and a decent upbringing, above all to free the child from being thought her bastard, she consents to marry. After all the prospective husband is ostensibly dying. Unfortunately he later turns out to be very much alive, and when Grusche's sweetheart returns from the wars he finds her married and—apparently—a mother. Without giving her a chance to tell him the whole story he leaves in despair. Her "bad" marriage, entered upon with "good" motives, is having mixed results: bad for herself, bad for her lover, good for the child. There are five acts, and this is the end of the third.

The fourth act is the story of an eccentric low character named Azdak. The vicissitudes of civil war makes this almost Shakespearian rogue into a judge. He passes the most unusual judgments—in a case of rape he holds the woman responsible on account of her alluring buttocks—but they always favor simple folk and not their exploiters. Act V is the comedy of Azdak in his capacity of judge under the rebel government. Later the original government is restored and, since Azdak had by chance saved the life of one of its high officials, he is re-appointed judge under the restored regime. One of the cases before him is that of Grusche, charged with having stolen the late governor's child. Azdak places the governor's wife and Grusche in a chalk circle with the child; they are both to take hold of it; the one who pulls hardest and gets the child out of the circle wins the lawsuit. The mother pulls violently and wins. Whereupon Azdak reversed the decision and gives the child to Grusche who loves the child too much to do it hurt. He also gives her a divorce so that she can marry her sweetheart and all can end happily. The final chorus states the principle

> that what there is
> shall belong to those who are good for it, thus
> the children to the maternal that they thrive
> the carriages to good drivers that they are driven well
> and the valley to the waterers that it shall bear fruit.[6]

In general what I said in praise of *The Good Woman of Sezuan* applies also to *The Circle of Chalk* which belongs next on the shelf to it. If there is an additional reason to praise the latter it is that it contains one of Brecht's best-drawn characters—the inimitable Azdak. Now Brecht has often been accused of a lack of interest in the individual, and no doubt many a flippancy can be quoted from essays, notes, or conversation to this effect. We have seen that the theorist Brecht professes that the individual is unreal except as the sum of social relations. All the same the best characters in his plays are individuals in a

[6] I quote from the unpublished translation by W. H. Auden and James Stern.

perfectly conventional sense. They have the same quality as the characters in "bourgeois" and pre-bourgeois literature. Whatever his intentions or his rationalizations Brecht is not an out-and-out collectivist who cannot see the individual trees for the social wood.

There is a Brecht below the political level, a Brecht whose traits gradually become clear to those who really absorb his works. (I use the pompous phrase "absorb his works" to underline the necessity of taking Brecht seriously and reading him attentively, which very few of his critics have done.) Henry James said: "When vigorous writers have reached maturity, we are at liberty to gather from their works some expression of a total view of the world they have been so actively observing. This is the most interesting thing their works offer us." And since some such assumption underlies my investigation (elsewhere) of our greatest modern playwrights Ibsen, Shaw, and Strindberg, I think it applicable also to Brecht. The political Brecht is a socialist. Beneath the socialist is what we might call the Confucian—by which I mean that Brecht's economic interpretation of human life, his materialism, is at the service of a finely humane, ironic, salty appreciation of normal experience. When he defends the normal, the ordinary, and the common, he is not therefore championing vulgarity and mediocrity; he is championing human nature. It is this that makes the average socialist writing appear bourgeois by comparison, for the average socialist writing is socialist only, so to speak, in terms of party policy. It is this that makes Brecht a poet of democracy in a sense deeper than that applied to the zealous supporters of particular causes. Today his is an uncommon sort of belief in the common man.

It was complained against some of Brecht's early plays that the people in them were unheroic and unsaintly, unsatanic also and therefore "undramatic." Their life had none of memories or the high purposes of life in Shakespeare or Ibsen. And there may have been justice in the complaint. Yet the point is that Brecht does not find "vegetable" life, that is, common happy-go-lucky experience as disgusting as did the elegant critics of the conservative journals during the Weimar Republic. I do not mean that he loves the suburbs or that he worships the workman. Consider this little verse of his, entitled "The Mask of Evil":

> An meiner Wand hängt ein japanisches Holzwerk
> Maske eines bösen Dämons, bemalt mit Goldlack.
> Mitfühlend sehe ich
> Die geschwollenen Stirnadern, andeutend
> Wie anstrengend es ist, böse zu sein.[7]

This is a human and moral study. It is hard, says Brecht, to be bad. The corollary is that it is natural to be good. Although within a framework of

[7]On my wall hangs a Japanese woodcarving
Mask of an evil demon, painted with gold
Compassionately I see
The swollen veins of his brow intimating
What a strain it is to be evil.
[My own literal translation.]

injustice and error it is not easy to be natural—in fact, it is impossible, as we learn in *The Good Woman of Sezuan*—that is no disproof of the original proposition. Before we can be natural again, before we can be good, there will be much struggle, and we ourselves will have swollen veins; that is the political problem. Its presupposition is a Rousseauistic belief in the natural, what I have called a Confucian willingness to rejoice in vegetative life.

Not that satisfaction in the processes of life is enough. Brecht represents goodness also as dynamic. "Great is the temptation of goodness," sings the chorus in *The Circle of Chalk* as Grusche makes up her mind to save the governor's child whatever the cost to herself. Temptation indeed! An almost futile temptation in a society where justice can be done through flukes and eccentricities, only through the canny, queer horse-sense of the wise fool Azdak. Yet despite the fact that "goodness is impossible" the Grusche's and the Shen Te's exist and from time to time succumb to the fatal "temptation of goodness."

The real character of Brecht might be illuminated by comparison with Jean-Paul Sartre, a comparison of Epic Theatre, the theatre of the outer eye, with Existential Theatre,[8] the theatre of the inner eye. There is a basis for comparison in that one play by each playwright gives a picture of things as they are and should not be *(Huis Clos* and *The Good Woman of Sezuan),* and one by each playwright shows the working out of positive and right moral principles *(Les Mouches* and *The Circle of Chalk).* The differences are obvious. The starting-point is different, the atmosphere is different, the philosophical background is different, the style is different, the emphasis is different. Brecht, I imagine, might easily think of Sartre as—in Arthur Koestler's terminology—a yogi, a believer in change purely from within, and Sartre might easily think of Brecht as a commissar, a believer in change purely from without.

But both would be wrong. Sartre's Zarathustrian exile is no escape; his Orestes is, on the contrary, utterly *engagé*; self-fulfillment is for him a moral and social as well as a personal and spiritual thing. We can see too that Brecht does not set up society as an abstraction against the individual. His aim is to change the world so that the goodness of Shen Te can come into effective existence. His preoccupation is the amiable common humanity of a water-carrier, the unsung heroism of a member of the underground who has to accept his comrades' ostracism with a good grace after he returns from the concentration camp, the enlarging of the area of human knowledge and control at the hands of a Galileo.

"Neither the saint nor the revolutionary can save us," says the clever Mr. Koestler, "only the synthesis of the two." If he means that both the inner and the outer eye are necessary to men, then nobody will disagree. Certainly the four plays of Sartre and Brecht are for some combination of the two. The yogi is an exile without being *engagé*. He could say with the immature Orestes, "What a superb absence is my soul." The commissar wants to have the world

[8]Described in *Horizon,* May, 1945, by John Russell; also currently by myself in *Partisan Review* and *The Kenyon Review.*

changed—as in the end Shen Te does—but he has not Shen Te's kindness as his motive, he is no victim to the "temptation of goodness." Both Brecht and Sartre are attempting a "synthesis" of the individual and the social. They differ in coming at it from opposite directions. Brecht reaches the individual via the collectivity, Sartre reaches the collectivity via the individual.

They are rival revolutionaries. Brecht's revolution is Marx's. It is "from without" for man is not independent of "externals." Sartre's revolution is—shall we say Nietzsche's? The Existentialist's? Christ's? It is "from within," for man is not simply a piece of the landscape. Yet Sartre's "inner" revolution leads to the liberation of Argos, and Brecht's "outer" revolution would bring "inner" peace to Shen Te. Sartre's hell—depicted in *Huis Clos*—is personal, yet a vote of censure against a society is inferred. Brecht's hell—Sezuan—is social, yet it is its meaning in individual lives that is measured. Perhaps Sartre's argument starts from a metaphysic, but its significance spreads out over the natural life of man. Perhaps Brecht's argument is simply socialism, but its significance is seen much more concretely, dramatically, poetically than in the so-called "proletarian literature" . . .

It seems that, as thinkers, Brecht and Sartre are approaching each other. Their dramaturgy makes one hope that the naturalistic and anti-naturalistic traditions of drama may also be coming closer together. Sartre is appreciably closer to naturalism than were his predecessors in the tradition of the Vieux Colombier. Brecht, for his part, has learnt more from the modern anti-naturalist theatre than perhaps any other playwright who aims at any accurate picture of the outer world. When, to secure a more faithful picture of the outer world, Brecht gave up more and more of the methods of stage realism in favor of Chinese and other conventions he was using non-naturalistic techniques for naturalistic ends. He was mixing the two primary elements of art—nature and convention—in a new way. When his plays took the form of operettas and fantasies, parables and abstract moralities, he was approaching a synthesis of what the naturalists and their antagonists had intended.

"X," writes one of our critics, "brings to this form of didacticism a creative and critical skill that has made ample use of the three most vitalizing tendencies in contemporary writing: the revolt against realism, the widening of the content of poetry, and the return to myth." X could be Sartre. It happens to be Brecht. The work of both encourages one to look forward to a future for drama. What kind of future? It may be one in which older concepts of tragedy and comedy have little meaning. Even the dominance of naturalism, and the concomitant insurgency of anti-naturalism, may be at an end. Who knows what time bears in her womb? Whatever the future for tragedy and comedy, for naturalism and non-naturalism, the work of Sartre and Brecht—in ways that are often different and sometimes the same—is already eloquent testimony for the playwright as thinker.

HORACE GREGORY:

Police Sergeant Malone and the Mysterious Case of Captain John Farley

"When John Farley said, 'I need a rest;
I want to live as though I were the Duke of Windsor
In a pair of tennis shorts, sun-glasses and a cork helmet
To keep the heat out of my brain,' I knew that something
Had gone wrong. When he said, 'Even my dentist
Tells me I need a rest and that the color of my eyes
Is turning pale.' I could have broken his case
Two weeks before he passed out of sight; I could have told him
That a trip to Cuba might end in disaster,
That you don't find heaven on a Sunday in Key West.

For some people that I know
The holiday runs like poison in their veins,
Yet millions fly from the city every year, the rich, the poor:
The school teacher who raises goats and chickens on a farm
Is almost certain to fall apart too soon;
The bank vice-president on his ranch in Arizona
Who owns a rodeo and sings 'cruel Barbara Allen'
Won't live too long or keep his name out of the papers;
The pretzel-vendor who takes his stand on a windy corner
Is likely to have a heart-attack at Far Rockaway—
Whether it's drink or manslaughter or a neighbor's wife
You can be sure it is the holiday again.
Even five-star generals after a war are found next morning
Under three inches of windshield glass and snow
And are posed for their last headlines
In the *Daily News.*
In New Years' celebrations
You can see the beginning of the end
For those who have the holiday fever in their eyes—
When the wish is to step out of doors for a breath of air
And you feel yourself dropping down sixty-seven floors
To the earth below the street where darkness is
The inside of Jonah's whale, it is then you know
The deep body of earth and sea is around you everywhere.
To save your nerves
You might call it an accident,
But you can't break a case unless you know the cause.

VICTOR H. JOHNSON:

The Warden Liked Dogs

They worked it pretty slick to begin with. We got orders to dig a hole outside the North Block. We were always digging holes and we never asked what they were for. That was our job, the digging. Mr. Simpson, the outside contractor under whom we worked, knew what they were for. That was his job.

Sometimes it was a basement for a new house they were putting up for one of the guards. Sometimes it was for a new sewer line. Or maybe it was the foundation for a new garage. San Quentin is a growing institution.

Mr. Simpson went out with us one morning and said, "Dig here." We dug. He gave more implicit instructions to the con-boss, an old Dago in for murder, and with about twelve of it already done. He'd be going home soon. About fourteen solid for a murder rap usually, then parole.

As a matter of fact, all of us would be going home soon. That's why we were digging outside the walls. They figured we were too short to take a duck over the hill. They had men up in towers with guns to restrain the impulsive.

We dug. We dug two or three days. We made a big hole. There were about twenty of us. The dirt was rich and soft and black. It would have been good dirt for a garden or flowers. It was the kind of dirt that makes things grow.

One day a whisper went through the crowd. I don't know who started it. You seldom know who starts whispers. You just hear them. I heard this one from a Mexican. A lot of Mexicans in San Quentin.

He was a young chap, in for some mild stealing. He tapped the dirt with his shovel and screwed up his face. "You know thees hole?"

I nodded my head.

"Thees hole—thees hole for gas-chamber."

"No?" My shovel had stopped and my face was glued on the young Mexican.

"Yes, I tell you! They make gas-chamber here."

Protest? It is revolting to share in the creation of an instrument that will send a fellow prisoner to death. The Mexican youth felt it, I felt it, we all felt it. That is why he whispered, why we all whispered. We were ashamed.

And the protest? Strike, refuse to work? Useless. I had tried that once before. Many were with me at the beginning, but when the guards came—only two of us went to the jute-mill. They stopped using the lime on the tables, the lime that ate holes in the waiters' clothes and made the bread placed on the bare wooden tables taste like lime. And they had got the extra men back in the mess-hall, the waiters they had taken off in the speed-up.

But solidarity fell away under the guards. There was the mistrust, the stool-pigeons filling our midst, and the criminal psychology, instinctively individualistic. They did not understand mass-action, the story of the city laid dead,

stopped in its tracks, idle, somber, awe-inspiring. No young worker could go through the San Francisco general strike without being impressed and remembering it.

These men were different and the situation was different. They were convicts, felons, outcasts. Whatever they did was wrong. There was no one to back them, no funds from other unions, no moral support—not even the little mimeographed workers' sheet—no speechmaking and parades to give them courage. Strike—and it was just the cells and bread and water, extra days and months of monotony and greyness.

They worked outside, in the air and sunshine and rain, and they dug holes and mixed concrete, and watched the flowers grow by the guards' houses and the grass on the green lawns. These thing had become dear to them—so dear after years of prison.

And soon they would be going home. They looked across the bay—the Campanile at the University of California, the ships blowing their whistles as they nosed through the mists, the Tribune Tower in the Oakland sunshine, the green train skirting the shore of wooded Mount Tamalpais, white steam blowing back over the coaches. Protest—and these things would not be. Other men would come to take their places, men designated in prison as "stir-wise," men who did time the easy way—without fighting back.

They looked and they dug. They dug a long ditch down to the shore from the big hole with the rich black dirt. They put a sewer-line in, with the inlet to the hole left open. It would be coupled onto the black cast-iron basins to hold the acid into which the cyanide pellets would be dropped under the chairs. They covered the sewer-line up.

The jack-hammer men came, men in grey, too, and they knocked down the wall of the North Block. The gas-engine sputtered and stopped. The air in the tank petered out, and the hammers stopped. The jack-hammer men wiped the sweat from their faces, grateful for the rest. The dust from the concrete settled.

A mechanic came and fixed the engine. We shoveled the stone away and loaded it into trucks.

We built forms in the hole, filled them with concrete, ran a concrete floor to meet that of the North Block. The cement-finishers smoothed over the floor, made it smooth and shiny. Two holes, twenty inches in diameter I think they were, we left in the floor. It was here that the hoppers, the cast-iron acid hoppers, would be.

Back in the North Block, further in, behind where the chamber would be installed, other men were at work, riveters and iron-workers and welders. They were building the death cells, two of them, outside the door of the chamber, where the condemed would spend their last hours. The spark from the welder's torch set a man's shirt afire. Mr. Simpson, standing next to him, crushed it out.

The tinsmiths put in the ventilating system to the death cells. It seemed strange, there in the shadows, that they were so solicitous of the air that men to die should breathe. There they were providing clean fresh air, and fifteen feet away they were preparing an instrument to shut off breath.

One day the work was interrupted. The prisoners from Folsom! Often had we heard those words in the yard. They were the men sentenced to die for the murder of Warden Larkin of Folsom. They were prisoners, fellow-prisoners, who had tried to escape from Folsom and killed the warden. And they would be the first to die in this new machine of death we were installing.

We all stopped work and watched them through the gate. They were under heavy guard. Newspaper men stood with scratch-pads, questioning, writing. Their escort held them to pose for pictures. Flashlight bulbs snapped. They posed bravely, anxious to show they weren't afraid. Guards moved close to them, to get into the pictures.

It was a tense moment. They had killed a warden, a man who turns the key on men's freedom. We all hated wardens. It is natural. They are not law and justice and righteousness and state to prisoners. They are keepers, walls, bars, locks, concrete.

Were we to continue to build the instrument to snuff out their lives, these men who had killed a warden? The faces about me said, no. They screamed it with silence. It exuded from their slouching bodies leaning on the shovels. One sentence, one word of courage and defiance, would set off the fire.

Supply it? Should I supply it? It would be easy. I had talked to strikers, knew how to upbraid, accuse, challenge to action. The mood was there. A word would inflame it. They would do little to me. I was a labor-prisoner, with organizations, papers, money, attorneys, influential sympathizers and politicians to take my part. They would play me up as a hero.

But they—the young Mexican, the old Dago, my fellow prisoners—had I the right to send them back behind the walls? Had I the right to send them to solitary, to keep them extra months in prison in futile protest? The death chamber would go in and those men would die in it. The whole forces of the State of California had so ordained. We would not stop it.

The young Mexican was at my side, Big Jack, the burglar, Grand Chula, Fats, fellow-prisoners and friends. I was known from the mess-hall strike. They were looking to see what I would do, waiting the word.

I shrugged my shoulders. The young Mexican nodded his head. Jack said, "Right!" They understood, we all understood, that protest was futile.

The prisoners from Folsom passed through the gate. The newsmen hurried away with their notes and photos. We returned to work in the North Block, walking slowly—and with our heads hung down.

One morning when we went out to work, the chamber was there. It had been unloaded in the night. We approached it with dread. This was actually it, the chamber, the death instrument itself. We could no longer console ourselves with the faint consolation that we had taken no part in the building. We were putting it in.. There it was.

Humanitarianism aside, it was a beautiful thing—hexagonal aluminum-painted metal sloping to a point at the top like a cone, with large thick glass windows. The metal door closed softly. A big wheel dogged it into place: "Turn Right To Seal." The chairs were there, two of them, black metal chairs

with holes perforated in the bottoms to let the gas through freely, and slots in the arms for straps. And the leather straps came with it.

It had a lever running to the outside to dump the cyanide eggs into the acid. And other levers to permit air, dampers, an arrangement for the doctor's stethoscope. A man from the factory was on hand to see that it was properly installed.

Willie the Goon, an immense monstrosity of a man with a big nose and thick lips and a child's mind, looked at the chamber. He raised his convict cap and scratched his wooly hair. "Hmmm! A two seater!"

He looked again. "Hmmm! Looks like a smudge-pot. That's it—the smudge-pot! Ha, ha, ha!"

He caught hold of the wheel, and turning it to the left and right like a child in a toy auto, cried, "Bzzzzzz! Look out! Don't get in the way, I'll run over you! Bzzzzzz!"

Willie turned his cap around backwards. The bill hung down his neck and his nose and heavy lips stuck out. He squatted low over the wheel, like a racing driver avoiding the wind. "Bzzzzzz! Don't get in the way, I tell you! I'll run over you. Bzzzzzz!"

The chamber was bolted into place, the hoppers connected, and the tinsmiths and mechanics put in the air-ducts and fans to flush it after it had served the purpose of the People of California. Electricians installed lights. Convict painters red-leaded the death cells.

We built the concrete walls up. The chamber was inside now. We ran a roof over to meet that of the North Block. A huge copper pipe, eighteen inches in diameter, was swung up above the roof of the cell-block. It was blowing the day we put up the last section—blowing hard. The big pipe see-sawed and swung in the wind. One strand of rope parted, and for long minutes it hung there, whipped about by the wind. Mr. Simpson himself raced aloft and caught a new turn about the swinging pipe. He was not Mr. Simpson any longer. He was Harry now. "I'll be glad when this job is over," he told us. "I don't like it any more than you fellows."

The wild ducks of winter came and each morning we could see them on the bay below us as we trudged up the hill. The fogs and rains came, too, and the sere brown hills blossomed out in green. And above us, on the hills and across the reach, the little yellow flowers of spring grew, turning the hillsides to yellow. One old man told me they were lupines.

They did not make us work in the rain. We could stay in our cells. And many of us chose the cells. If we must work on the chamber, the next best thing was to do as little as possible. It was small consolation, but the mind seized it.

Harry asked me if I wanted a fog-pass. It was a compliment, the compliment of trust, a rare thing in prison. He did not feel that I would run away while the fogs hung thick and heavy and the guards could not see. "No. Thanks, Harry," I answered. And there were other men who gave the same answer, and for the same reason.

Someone brought to work a digest in which the merits, from a humanitarian viewpoint, of the electric chair versus the gas-chamber were debated. The men discussed the issue eagerly. They would have preferred that the article deal with the gallows versus the gas-chamber, for this instrument we were installing was to replace the gallows. We liked to think it was a better way of death.

One of the mechanics accidentally broke one of the heavy glass windows with his hammer. It was not sabotage, but the young instructor in psychology in the prison classes used it in his lectures from Menninger to illustrate the "purposive accident." And the testing of the gas-chamber was delayed.

A pig was chosen for this purpose, a little pig, a shoat from the prison pig ranch. A wire cage was built just for the little pig. He must have been a very little fellow, for I saw the cage and it was extremely tiny. Perhaps it was big enough for a good-size cat to stand erect.

I did not see the execution of the little pig. We had been taken off the job when that time came, and it was an official occasion, with doctors, warden, officials, and not a place for inmates. Only the story drifted back that the little red pig did not die quickly, that he struggled and squealed and fought the fumes.

Rising over the North Block where the condemned men can see it when they toss the baseball back and forth among themselves in their hour of exercise in the afternoon, is the huge copper pipe that will carry away the fumes after they are dead. As they sit in their cells, in the shadows, they must think about the little pig.

The inmates had it that the chamber was supposed to have been tested on a dog. But the warden liked dogs, and chose the little red pig instead. Perhaps it was his way, the warden's way, of protest.

ROBERT B. HEILMAN:

FREDERICK J. HOFFMAN: *Freudianism and the Literary Mind.* Louisiana State University Press.

HARRY SLOCHOWER: *No Voice Is Wholly Lost . . . : Writers and Thinkers in War and Peace.* Creative Age Press.

The awareness of history which, in Spengler's view, defines our culture may, as it is specialized and compressed by the crescendo of disturbing forces which beat upon it in the civilizational phase of the culture, become a morbidly acute awareness of the present and immediate past, a self-consciousness which appears in a kind of public diary-writing and fever-charting. The daily papers are our manna and our monuments; for history we have their "Ten Years Ago" columns; the livelier journalists make best-selling pastiches of old headlines and photographs—Only Yesterday; the universities, ever-obliging, devote whole courses to explaining all about current events. At less popular levels, scholars and thinkers keep turning the ideological productions of the day inside out, tracing sources, measuring influences, estimating cultural and psychic significance, conjecturing our spiritual losses and gains from moment to moment. This almost neurotic self-examination, this feverish hour-by-hour searching of the mirror, defines our state: we keep worrying about ourselves because we are terribly uncertain and anxious; we make passionate efforts at understanding because we have no established, organic method of understanding; we describe—and hope that we are building. Of this rather harrowing spectacle of a dissolving age trying to grasp and anchor itself one sees a small part in the books of Messrs. Hoffman and Slochower. Not that these gentlemen are harried or frenzied; they are cool and calm agents of an anguished world, in whose quest for self-knowledge they assist by saying, each in his own special way, "This is how the western world has been thinking in the last quarter-century." The age influences them to study certain influences upon the age—notably the impact upon literature of certain of the age's intellectual endeavors and tendencies. And the compulsiveness of the age leads them, at the end, into mild essays in prediction.

Dr. Hoffman is doubly of his age: his subject is a phenomenon which not only had its provenience in the age but of which it may be said, also, that it had to happen here; for when the *supra*-conscious (the idea of God) went into the discard, it was almost a dialectical necessity that we find an *infra*-conscious. Further, in tracing the extension of Freudian psychology into literature, Dr. Hoffman uses a modern form of analysis—that of the doctoral dissertation. He carefully defines the influencing force (Freudian Theory), accounts for the transmission (Spread of Freud's Theories), gives major accounts of those in whom the influence is in one way or another conspicuous (Joyce, Kafka, Lawrence, Mann, etc.) and lesser accounts of others. This influence, we observe, has three modes: Freudian principles clarify the psychic development of the writer and hence the relationship of writer to work (Kafka); the areas of human experience made accessible by Freudian method are utilized by the writer (Joyce); the psychiatric process itself is subject (Waldo Frank). Such treatises are usually stronger in detail than in the management of theoretical issues: Hoffman's discussion of the concept of influence, for instance, is labored. Further, the inherent restrictions of the influence-study are likely to cut off perspective: as applied to *The Magic Mountain,* Hoffman's method does not allow adequate consideration of the structural significance of Settembrini and Naphta. Finally, he might have amplified his discussion of the application of Freudianism in literary criticism by considering, for instance, in addition to Edmund Wilson's impeccable statements on the critical act, the critical practice as evidenced in, say, Wilson's essays on Dickens and James. Hoffman could then have pointed the lesson that a passion for psychological intricacies may lead to a begging of critical questions.

But this is a quite superior dissertation: the tone is one of detachment, even, at times, of urbane irony; unlike the doctors who find all fertility in the little patches which they have weeded, Hoffman is a master of qualifying disclaimers and disavowals; to prove the relative solidity and maturity of his book as a study of the teens and twenties, one need only glance at the trivialities of S. H. Adams's book on Woollcott; there are bright obiter dicta ("timidity—a sort of perverted gentleness"), but little jargon (there is a curable habit of "associated with"); most important of all, Hoffman, in contrast with the doctors who flee in fright from critical problems, is constantly moving from encyclopedism toward criticism. It is especially the chapters on Kafka and Sherwood Anderson which transcend the narrower limits of the study and border on full critical essays. If the reviewer feels at times that the evaluative is less ample than it might be, he remembers, also, that in this field, where there has been so much loose talk, and where halfbaked knowledge is widespread, such a basic work of sound definition is essential.

Dr. Slochower proposes to give more substantial assistance to an unhappy age in search of understanding: his project is to map out the kinds of thought we have tried between wars, with some reference to theorists (such as Dewey, Maritain, Santayana, Freud, Marx) but with chief attention to literary artists whose work is intellectually analogous to, or shows the influence of, the former. First he describes the "Surrender of Absolutes," with Dewey in the lead, and with different subordinate roles for Huxley, Gide, Wolfe, Kafka, and others. Found in the "Embrace of Absolutes" are agrarians, Catholics, humanists, Proust, George, Rilke, and in the rear, as befits the unclean, the fascists. Then there are those who have found no haven at all: Werfel, Joyce, O'Neill are the chief. The last two sections of the book suggest a haven for all—a new secular, universal order in which the communal and the individual receive equal "weighting," as Slochower might say. The writers who look in this direction are Heinrich Mann, Seghers, Steinbeck, Malraux, and Thomas Mann.

As an analyst of the *ideas* in literature, as a translator of drama into symbol, Slochower is shrewd and vigorous; he brings a considerable erudition to bear upon the interpretative exercises; and in both his reading of individual works and his systematization of an author's thought as it develops throughout a series of works, it is probable that even absolutists and anti-absolutists, with neither of whom Slochower is wholly sympathetic, might find, if not always conclusions to adopt, at least enlightenment and stimulus. The anatomy of Malraux's *Man's Fate,* for instance, and of Thomas Mann's works appears reasonably detached and inclusive. The premises, however, are not always complete: his view of the structure and significance of *Point Counter Point* is weakened by his failure to see the organic role of Spandrell. But beyond individual interpretations lies a larger problem which springs from his method of considering literary works primarily as socio-historico-philosophical documents. Not that he excludes aesthetic issues; but to him the aesthetic uniqueness is secondary, notable only as the product of a cast of mind, moral outlook, or historical situation: "The disconnected sequence is the technical aspect of the split in Silone's new persuasion" and " . . . Austrian letters turned more and more toward a sensitive impressionism which fought shy of making decisions." Such perceptions are suggestive enough; yet in the method lurks some defect which comes to the surface in fanciful theorizing—about, for example, the *k*-sound in Kafka's works and in *Castorp,* and the recurrence of *m* in O'Neill's writings. But given the provenience of the formal idiosyncrasies, there is still the question of their quality, their success. Now as long as the critical scheme is only "sociologic," as Slochower would say, and retrospective, aesthetic evaluation is not vital; we can *describe* a society by merely recounting, or counting, what it wrote. But when we start weighing, assessing, or, still more, blue-printing the society, we need distinctions, and if we find the assessor neglectful of formal and tonal inadequacies, we come upon the clay foot that is bad in the assessor and worse in the prophet. For a case in point: Steinbeck and Malraux are cast as teacher's pets in Slochower's classroom: they give some clue to the future cooperative commonwealth of free wills whose flag we at last find Slochower waving. When, then, we find Slochower, keen reader that

he can be, oblivious to the sentimentalities and simplifications in Steinbeck (on which he could get some good tips from R. P. Warren), and to the loose organization and homiletic prosiness of *Man's Hope,* which, because, in his awe-inspiring phrase, it "combines the narcissistic and the authoritative mode," he prefers to the far more successful *Man's Fate*—we must wonder indeed how trustworthy a utopist he is.

If on aesthetic grounds his incompleteness has its inconveniences, Slochower's logical manipulation of his materials demands a still sharper eye. He begins with the contention that the anti-absolutists are themselves entangled in absolutistic assumptions or in disenabling uncertainties. Though he applauds Dewey's having disposed of a "ghostly metaphysics" and should therefore in turn win the applause of the anti-traditionalists, he stresses the frailty of Dewey's experimentalism and seems thus to have aroused great indignation along the Pragmatist Line. His counterpoint, which again ought to soothe the Deweyites, is that the traditionalists and absolutists have inner contradictions and "waverings," can't get away from flux and time, are betrayed by—in another phraseological surprise-package—"modern directives." In a sense, of course, history intervenes in the birth and maturing of any system of thought, and by a quick reference to its temporal matrix Slochower might easily cut down, with neo-Gibbonian indirection, any religious view of the universe. Other types of student would wish first to examine the quality of the spiritual insight. Slochower's attack is less naive than that of someone like Barzun, so that it requires more energetic scrutiny, but it comes out much the same: once again we hear about the medieval wars which establish the radical superiority of the jaunty "Atabomb" Age, and once again we are invited to feel—as one is tempted to say after a bout with Slochowerese—that statism and Tatism are weighted on much the same angle.

The trouble with Slochower's public insistence that no voice is wholly lost is that throughout two-thirds of the book the reader senses, in occasional little homilies, in the tendentious analyses which find invalidating defects in one type of voice after another, and in the structural pattern, a semi-hidden drift: the drift comes to the surface and defines the whole critical stream when at last we learn that it is Marxism which avoids the errors of both absolutists and anti-absolutists and embodies all the merits of both the relative and the absolute, of the individual and the collective, of man and masses. Further, Slochower rattles off some quick analogies between Marxism and Freudianism, and next, rather astonishingly, we find him using the phrase "the Marxist-Freudian analysis," as if there were *one* such analysis. His final praise is for *it* and for the writers who, in apparent consonance with it, foretell the happy cooperative future (of these, however, Thomas Mann is rebuked for his coolness toward the masses).

A question and a footnote on logic occur. If temporal emphases encroach upon and vitiate humanism and neo-Catholicism, how does Marxism, whose historical context Slochower notes, escape? Can Marxism alone be an immaculate conception, the luster of its validity dimmed by no spot of time? What if the classless order be only the compensatory ideal of a temporary phase of the human predicament? Further, in his insistence on the "socially human" as the way to salvation, Slochower indicates, as he must, his disbelief in religious solutions: he brushes off Thomism, T. S. Eliot, and the fictional statements of Werfel and Silone. He begs the question, that is to say, of whether the "social" and the "human" can exist without the only experienced kind of sanctioning force directed toward the actualizing of the potentially human: it may be that only the suprahuman ideal, mythically formulated, can in some degree discipline the subhuman ingredient ever ready to destroy ironically the humane aspirations of the detached mind.

These few glosses on Slochower's thought are based on what he appears to be saying. One is never quite sure. For Slochower's style, though capable of achieving force and variety, is often scandalously bad. With some command of technical vocabularies, he always inclines toward the exotic way of saying a thing; he flirts alternately with circumlocution and ellipsis; to the vices of the professor he adds the vices of the man in the street, subjecting the reader to a clatter of such words as *directive, angle, differential, aspect, weighted,* and *overlap* (noun; at one place it appears to mean the indirection of artistic

method); he marries scholastic jargon and journalese. He falls into a callow euphuism which includes, besides puns and mixed metaphors, such facile antitheses as this: fascism is "the price paid for not using the art of politics and ignoring the politics of art." He uses words that do not say what he appears to mean: *exceptionalism* for *exceptionalness, futuristic responsibility* for *responsibility for* (or *to*) *the future, futuristic dynamics* for, possibly, *dynamic relationship to the future.* He uses a word-order and rhythm beloved of professors of education and psychology and by them bequeathed to the journalists: *freedom element, Marx's universal thinking, unstable Nazi psychology,* Chekhov's *static technique*—which means, presumably, the technique of securing dramatic effects without a conventional forward-movement. Add to scores of such phrases statements like *"Man's Fate* is weighted on the individual formula," and the result is a surface obscurity more exhausting than substantial profundity.

It may be questioned whether a sick age will take much comfort from this philosopher "so hard of utterance and so misty to be conceived," especially since, after fighting through a thorny verbal surface, one has as reward a gospel that seems to rest on a rather constricting base. Perhaps both books do better in diagnosis than in prognosis. Hoffman's study, of course, does not call for a quick look ahead, and he does not go out upon too brittle a limb of the Tree of Foreknowledge. He merely gives us an option: we can achieve a rational management of affairs, in accord with the later optimistic positions of Freud and Mann; or, finding clues in Kafka and Kierkegaard, we can live by a religious acceptance of irrational deity. Slochower believes in the realizing of the former option, the achievement of a universal, but diversified, classless society. "The art which corresponds to it," he says, "should be a smiling art." At one time Slochower does say for tragedy that in this new society it will for the first time be "pure"; but at another he places comedy "higher, in that it does not take human defeat as solemnly . . . " One's final suspicion is that Slochower, perhaps more than he recognizes, considers tragedy merely as solemn, or, in another sense, the product of historical and social contingencies. But in the promise of the day of "smiling art" must lie, one fears, too casual a regard for the human frailties which in these days are but too evident and which, if frail men are to find a countervailing strength, must find organic accommodation in an order conceived in more radical terms than those of societal readjustments.

ARTHUR J. CARR:

PAUL GOODMAN: *Art and Social Nature.* Vinco Publishing Co.
The Facts of Life. Vanguard.

That the briary perplexities of our civilization need not cause the stout-hearted creative artist and the critic to flee into the remote comforts of regressive mysticism is happily exemplified in Paul Goodman. *Art and Social Nature,* a collection of essays on "libertarian" social theory and aesthetics, and *The Facts of Life,* a volume of short fictions and a brief, five-act play, called *Jonah,* roughly complement each other as commentary and example.

Mr. Goodman would like to be regarded as " 'a man of letters' in the old sense," a title not presumptuous for a writer wide-ranging in subject and well-favored in his style ("of being a free artist rather than something else.") He can be simple, serious, wise, and didactic, formidable in dialectic, and as baffling, no doubt, in controversy—where he has the grace to learn even as the debate weaves in and out—as he is disarming in the earnest and acute analysis of his own artistic motives (see "Literary Method and Author Attitude"). "God forbid," he cries, "that a critic should argue for the status quo, and what a status quo!" And as artist he is also a conscious critic. That his stories and plays may be read as exemplary of his theories is no impairment of the pleasure they afford but an increase in the whole of Goodman's literary services.

The major subject of *Art and Social Nature* is a critical indictment of modern industrial society and propositions for "libertarian," ameliorative action to be taken by individuals and small "natural" groups. His premises are optimistic, if not anarchistic: "There is no doubt that, once awakened, the natural powers of men are immeasurably stronger than these alien institutions (which are indeed only the pale sublimations of natural powers)." "History is the actuality of human powers. It is Homer and Sophocles that demonstrate that we can be poets." (Yet were Homer and Sophocles wholly independent of such "alien institutions," and might not the "pale sublimations" be otherwise described as the given forms of society within which the artist at any moment has his being?) But our society, Goodman swears, is at once organic ("Disease is no less organic than health.") and chaotic, in our lack of unanimous moral judgments. The Demon of the modern world is "unnatural coercion," degrading corollary of the dehumanization of production and of consumption. "To be coerced has become second nature." And the Demon has only natural substance: "The guilty ones turn out to be little children and dear parents, earnest radicals, teachers unconscious of their intent, and even ancestors who are dead." What Marx wrote of as "the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation" cannot redeem itself, for the revolution that proceeds from those who have been exploited and degraded will embody (the instance is State-Socialism) the coercive habits and the institutionalized "ideals" of oppression and of morally debased "standards of living."

There is nothing for it but to advocate a dual revolution (a hopeful synthesis of Freud and Marx) of individuals and groups. The program which Goodman sketches in "Revolution, Sociolatry, and War" urges the libertarian to work at a job which realizes his "human powers," to re-evaluate his standards of living (and to commit "prudent" but actual "crimes" against the official repressions of society), to exercize "direct political initiative" in community problems, to permit and encourage sexual satisfactions, especially of the young (here Goodman appears to follow the radical Freudianism of Wilhelm Reich), to "mutually analyze and purge" their souls through "ethical discussions," and to abstain "progressively" from anything connected with war.

It will have struck most readers, I think, that Goodman subscribes to something more and a great deal less than "most of the propositions of Aristotle, Kant, Marx, and Freud," and that the accents are sometimes those of Gide and of Thoreau. It may be felt that Goodman plays too loudly and even roguishly upon the Rousseauistic strains in Marxism and too readily treads the mazes of the narrower and less humane (and scientifically dubious) elaborations of Freudianism. What he calls "the original dignity and many-sided potentiality of unmarred human-beings" and his reliance on "orgastic potency" as a force of social redemptiveness may seem not sufficiently hard-headed in a radical, socialistic man-of-letters. Yet Goodman's emphasis is not naive nor merely inept philosophy. It represents a fundamental criticism, indeed, of most institutionalized brands of socialism and some widely accepted views of social psychology. As a critic he asks the crucial question regarding the source and nature of value. At the center of his ideas rides his certainty that capitalistic industrial society has begotten a kind of Narcissism in social teleology, which compulsively seeks only "improved" and more "efficient" means of attaining its corrupted and neurotic ideals. "The expropriators are in turn expropriated"; but what if the new proprietors are themselves debased? Thus in psychology the theory of the well-adjusted personality becomes a cartoon, infinitely adjustable to making the best of bad bargains.

Nevertheless, the program of action that Goodman maps out falls comically far short of adequacy. The implications point to the desirability of a "small society," but how the dream-conditions of such a state may be fecund of improvement in the dehumanized, big society is by no means shown. "Consider if several million persons, quite apart from any 'political' intention, did only natural work that gave them full joy!" Such merry-hearted evangelism, if quite apart from any "political" intention, is on the same high level of socially constructive thinking as Mr. Truman's Christmas Eve eulogy of the Sermon on the Mount.

There remains a great breach between the long forepleasures of Goodman's program

of approach to an improved society and any indication of what the desirable social consummation is to be. His dilemma is not resolved, as between the society in which repressions are enforced and the necessity of escaping the repressions before the individual forces of rehabilitation can be freed. His meliorism is less thorough than the indictment, his prescription less searching than the diagnosis. That Goodman farcically admits the predicament may be implicit in his figure of Jonah—a whimsical, reluctant, and authentic prophet of doom, assured of the inefficacy of his prophetic message, yet not wrong, and not deceived, only destined to play his part with bad grace and good humor.

HARRY ROSKOLENKO:

KARL SHAPIRO: *Essay on Rime.* Reynal & Hitchcock.

The poet-turned-critic has ideal conditions for the practice of literary legerdemain when exorcising the black arts of criticism. Some of these sharp gentlemen have argued for regionalism and metaphysics while producing very dull examples of that school; others, less rigid, have blasted their trends toward science, nature, dialectics and the sociological muse. Each one has trailed his coteries with much fury and little poetry. As Shapiro says,

> Critics in particular have minced matters
> By acquiring all authority to talk.

This is doubtless a wholesale opinion now that the challenge comes home to the hothouse itself. Divorced from life or the substance of dreams, the critics, for the most part, have submitted tiresome commentaries, substitutions for literature with specialized formulas to back up their lack of original ideas and imagination, so that the flow outward from the critic to the pale poet inwardly has had a poor time of it. But now we are in for new vistas, with a pentametric conscience beating ghosts of English prosody on the doorsteps of American poetry. What the critic has failed to do, Shapiro assails; and if he stumbles over some old bones, new hats or surrealist poker-faces, it is his own literary nightmare he is taking for a walk. For he is examining in the prose which he writes most of the time in this essay—poetry only now and then—the source of our Rime, its reason and its ruin. Many faces look in at him through the mirrors on the ceiling.

Our rhythms are unnatural, says Shapiro, except in Whitman, who "shocked polite society." Browning was "hippity-hop"; Milton was pure; Hopkins had only a theology and not even, alas, his invention of sprung-rhythms; of Eliot's "Ash Wednesday" Shapiro says: "for in a hundred years no poem / Has sung itself so exquisitely well." Of course *Ulysses* was a "magnificent failure," a quote borrowed by Shapiro; yet there is fulsome praise for Joyce's "rhetoric of rhyme." To come a bit closer to our scene, Auden "employs Braces of proselike forms" similar to Shapiro's own mixture and mould; Yeats had his great ear, and was not a mathematical dissecter of the line, which was his good fortune; but the Cults have sinned most with their visual practices and aberrations. Cummings, despite himself and his designs, is still a fine performer, whereas Rimbaud was obviously deranged by arrangement and by the false fruit of fancy, not poetry. If the essay makes any sense, one must denounce all *avant-garde* writers, from Rimbaud to Mayakovsky. The Objectivists get the merry morning and an impolite stare; so does Lawrence, who merely sat between the Imagists and the Objectivists and just sat—whereas William Carlos Williams had at least his microscope for dull company. Stephen Spender is where he started, in a circle; and Marianne Moore is a jeweler by trade, according to Shapiro, who has his own blueprint for poetry. Each ingredient of poetry must constantly be checked, he says: so much melody, sense and metre per pound of poem. No wonder the professors beam. It is so mathematical, precise, and as self-contained as a loud drum, even though he breaks through the skin with self-envelopments of ideal situations.

The section called "Confusion In Language" has the inherent mystique of the general theme and goes from poetry posturing in tweeds and 57th Street semantics to whimsy, irony, and self-accusation at the services Shapiro rendered before he became the elder statesman. *Obscurantism* is the agile culprit everywhere, alternating with sociology, naturalism, economics, psychoanalysis, and special pleading. The *personal,* even when dedicated to Democracy as in Whitman, is not particularized enough into art; it remains so much bric-a-brac in somebody's linen closet. Hart Crane, second to Whitman, is the dervish suicide of his own dance, and not much healthier than the amoralists (Lawrence), the Marxists, the Freudians, the war poets and the surrealists. The classical heart has come up the poop and is surveying the swan on the sea, with this dictum. Influences from other countries are taboo, not normal, says Shapiro. Yet what Eliot took from the French has never shocked anybody because it was done in the King's *English,* in modern accents. MacLeish, if he has offended, has been best at Shapiro's raw abstractions of the imitation of the social man, if for the sake of FDR. It is poetry of the mind and not of the heart which Shapiro opposes, but he has on occasion mixed his own biology with the political banisters.

In the final section of this didactic essay, "The Confusion of Belief," all the black flags are out and the lights go green in this concert of crimes in Rime. The extension of virtue, if by suicide alone, is Crane's purple heart. The *myth* of the *bridge* is not sufficient. Crane did not really *love.* The times were bad for poets, thinks Shapiro. (As if they ever had good times, from Socrates to Truman. Under paternal care they served political projects, added style to Presidential addresses, serving public address systems, anonymous careers, without honor or rhyme.) Shapiro decries the wrangling between the poets, as if there is anything American about that. One has only to recall Catullus in a better age and his poems to Suffenus if one wants a first-rate brawl. Then too, Shapiro is his own good example, as he well shows. He even objects to competition, which is rather a tender notion in a Christian society, for if poets are not like athletes, they are at least concerned with permanence. And yet the belief of the ordinary-man (as opposed to poet-man)—even if he does not *sing*—can be just as negative after you have examined him for the full growth of his *faith.* It is at best a word with linguistic furnishings of the heart. Shapiro sees all the confusions created by the isolation from an adequate belief, though Lord knows what he favors in this smorgasbord of the sentimental, with his tidbits of Marx, Eliot, MacLeish and Christ; all of Saintsbury and Lanier; Chicago, Sydney, Milne Bay and now, the Connecticut Idyll. Problems of geography can be turned into problems of morality, or into mediums for similar diffusions. It is indeed his *personal mystery.* Poor Freud, sadly, became too popular: he should have kept off the streets, away from the people, stayed in the privacy of the clinic and the medical test-tube, says Shapiro. Look at the terrific cultural damage! How strange that every parvenu draws his bow, aims his arrow at Freud and then lands in some church with a box of wafers in his hands. Then this, almost as a summary:

> The rime produced by soldiers of our war
> Is the most sterile of the century.

This indictment is a stab at the essential guts of Shapiro's own literature, and a frank disavowal as well!

The book, nevertheless, has intense interests even though it suffers from surface conceits and values, with alleged public meanings adorning the privacy of usages. What should have been a witty text comes through in a variation of vulnerable ecstasies. The special pleading indulged in by sentimental critics has given a false atmosphere to the book, supposedly written "without sources and texts" in the Netherlands East Indies. This is rather shocking since Shapiro spent most of his New Guinea stay at Milne Bay, with enough books from the library on the hill, near Waga, to fill up a hundred fox-holes. Before a myth grows about this *daring* bit of scholarship without texts (none was needed and it reads like that) it had best be laid to rest.

PRUDENCIO DE PEREDA:

WILLIAM MARCH: *Trial Balance*. Harcourt, Brace.

In the modern American short story, extremes in popularity and obscurity, good and poor writing, productivity and barrenness have been the rule. One man who has held tightly to his own course is William March, and though his collection of fifty-five personally selected short stories is the present fruit of a very individual (and still 100% functioning) career, it seems an accounting of all good writing in the past decade's short stories.

Mr. March is now receiving a thousand dollars for each published story, but the motivating ideals, the ideas, thoughts and feelings in these later pieces are as in his first stories that appeared almost exclusively in the little magazines. Even the superb craftsmanship has had to take just a few short steps towards an enviable perfection because Mr. March started writing only when he thought he was good and ready. His first short story—the first in this chronologically arranged collection—, "The Little Wife," is still one of his best, just as it is one of the finest short pieces in our literary history. Mr. March's record of self-sacrificing integrity and dutiful sincerity is one of the rarest things in our big-moneyed literature.

And, though his work is definitely individual and self-directed, William March has not built a special or precious world for himself and his "creations." He has been interested in ordinary people—in little people and the things that keep them "little." "We all live," he once said, "in rooms with four walls and no doors." That may be his own feeling, but his people are full of courage and protest and action. Though they may all ultimately fail, they *do* try—and they are heard.

For William March has appointed himself historian to all of these sufferers who would otherwise go unsung and unheeded: the little man in the cheap hotel room who tries to figure out in "A Sum in Addition" how to stretch his capital of $17.45 into the $394 needed to bury his dead baby and pay his wife's hospital bill. (He went to his suicidal death under the cold loneliness of the thought that nobody gave a damn.) The dying woman in "The Arrogant Shoat" who regrets her life that brought her only little hardship, eight well-raised children and all emptiness, and who weeps with regret over the one chance she had as a girl to run away from it all and join a circus with her trained pig. (Her husband and friends cannot understand her, and her husband remembers their rich, full life together.) Then there is the bright young heiress in "Not Worthy of a Wentworth" who showed a penchant for simple workingmen as husbands, and went insane after her family broke the fourth such engagement—this to the local baker.

William March has given these people more than a hearing. He *has* given a damn, and, if a definite type of immortality may seem small compensation for broken and wasted lives, there is always the chance that someone else might not have to do it again. I do not think that anyone can read "She Talks Good Now," the best of the later stories, and not fail to see through the conventional mask that Negro nursemaids must hold over their own feelings.

Mr. March is a writer without an apparent style. On the contrary, he has given accepted English words a new pungency and their use a new deftness. Witness the scene in "The Toy Bank," between an impoverished mother and her young son who gets a bank as a birthday present. Such abused words as "bitterness" and "mockery" take on their real, original meaning again under March's very certain writing. In "A Short History of England," a tour de force becomes a moving document through the economic use of feeling and language. William March never lets hysteria or sentimentality pull him off the course—he never overwrites! His is a simple, sound telling with the right words in the right places.

Moving in his own orbit, William March wrote anti-fascist stories ("Personal Letter" and "The Pattern that Gulls Weave") long before Hitler became front-page news. His

"Happy Jack" has a political intention only as a secondary and unnecessary objective—the feeling of all humanity against lynching and mutilation is strongly enough contained in it to give it a pressure of its own. In "The First Sunset" the creation of the world is lifted out of the coldness of Genesis into a new human dignity by a true anti-Nazi.

As in all his work, Mr. March has maintained a well-disciplined objectivity here—but his objectivity is a two-edged sword. In his very sincere effort to write truly and impersonally, he has so identified himself with his people and his problems that they have seemed to become his own. The aptness for reproducing the most intimate of the people's thoughts, the close association with their hopes and feelings makes it seem as if he were always there—his presence hidden by his integrity. No writer could hope for more.

In "She Talks Good Now," he has been so successful that readers are led to wonder if he has been able to catch the overtones of his own work, if he has felt the terrible yearning of the Negress for her little charge. Since there is no doubt of the reader's getting the full impact of this, everything seems quite perfect. One would almost like to have Mr. March read—and enjoy—his own work.

I think every writer has an emotional axe to grind. It is this that gives his natural creative urge a directional force. A man who hates will write sharply and forcefully of the injustices he opposes, and a man in love will create a true woman, whether her name be Emma Bovary or just plain "Red." William March's feeling is Generosity—from which his understanding and feeling for his people flow with the same soft—but purposeful—deftness as the words of his work. It is this that leads him to the cold hotel rooms and the empty farm-houses, to the side-street home of the pitiful dressmaker who yearned for that "shop in St. Louis, Missouri," and to the luxurious home in New York City where the Negro nursemaid had but one fault—that of loving her child charge. His integrity and skill control the feeling—just as they shape the stories to perfection—but they never hold it back.

A noted English critic has said that the lack of mass popularity for William March's work is one of the things people will not be able to understand fifty years from now—when, the critic adds, March's stuff will be read as widely that we now read Lloyd Douglas and A. J. Cronin. Many reviewers of *Trial Balance* have expressed the same idea.

True recognition of March will come later, I agree, but I predict a great increase in his followers in the *immediate* years to come. The Atomic Age brings a compression of human values, a sense of concentration on one's immediate human equation and hopes, but it also brings a somewhat contradictory awareness of the whole world and everybody in it. William March has taken a long lead in both those ideals. We will still have great literature among whose pages Napoleon gets his back scrubbed in a field tent and kings and presidents talk of everyday things, but sensitive people will return again and again to the antics of a crazy Spaniard, the secret heart of a Dublin Jew, and the little people of William March.

ANKEY LARRABEE:

OSCAR WILLIAMS: *That's All That Matters.* Creative Age Press.

GWENDOLYN BROOKS: *A Street in Bonzeville.* Harper.

That's All That Matters is a depressing collection—depressing because it is that literary monster, the better-than-mediocre. Mr. Williams is a responsible, and often a lyric, poet, but he is too frequently self-destroying. Excellent images are crippled by pedestrian qualifications; expert ideas are mismanaged. As in *The Man Coming Toward You* his theme is an examination of "today's particular conflicts" (to quote from the jacket), an examination which is carried out through the poet's "inner eyes." While such myopic observation is often successful, as in "The Praying Mantis Visits a Penthouse," it eventually

exhausts itself. Again, many of the poems have a fine violence of language, but these are counter-balanced, especially in the first section, by a ponderously coy series dealing with God and nature. Unfortunately, this is not a book to which one can have too strong a reaction, either way.

By now the benign affirmations which William Rose Benét inevitably showers on each new poet are as familiar as the parallel announcements of Thomas Manville. However, in the case of Gwendolyn Brooks he is, according to the letter at least, quite correct: she is a "remarkable young poet." In *A Street in Bronzeville* she pulls out all the stops, from the—I suppose unavoidable—folk poetry, through Audenesque ballads of disaster, to a fairly competent sonnet sequence. When she writes spontaneously Miss Brooks is interesting, though often clumsy; but this is more a matter of technical inexperience than anything else. One's greatest objection to her book is based on the old misconception that a Negro poet is at his best, and surest of an audience, when he writes in the vernacular—a dialect which, I suspect, exists only in literature. (I see no reason why a poem should increase in value when it is couched in the language of Uncle Remus.) When she abandons these occasional vagaries, Miss Brooks is sometimes unique, frequently good.

JAMES LAUGHLIN:

EVELYN WAUGH: *Brideshead Revisited.* Little, Brown.

By all means read this novel! It has all of Waugh's old wit and bite, plus a great deal that is new with him. The war and his conversion to Rome seem to have endowed him with a compassion and sympathy that are just as appealing in their way as was his earlier iconoclasm. "Brideshead" is the name of a great English country estate and the story tells of the decline of a noble Catholic family. There is just enough sentiment to catch your feelings and not enough to degrade the subject. I happened to be reading Stendhal the following week, and it struck me that, apart from the difference in scale, there was in both books the same quality of creating belief. Waugh's characters in this book really are, and it wouldn't be a surprise to me if they stay around for a good many years. I hear the sort of coy rumbling that indicates the book will be a bestseller. Don't let this put you off. The book club members won't comprehend its fine points, but you will—and will be obliged for them.

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